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THE MISTRESS OF BRAE FARM.

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CHAPTER I.

THE MISTRESS OF BRAE FARM.

THE young mistress of Brae Farm was standing as usual looking over the little green gate that divided the garden from the big farmyard.

It was still early in the afternoon, and there was a hush and stillness over the whole place as though a universal siesta prevailed. Presently from the long green meadow the cows would come slowly in single file to the milking-shed, and later on the cart-horses clattering heavily down the lane on their way to the pond.

The turkeys and geese and even the cocks and hens were all afield, only the pigeons sat in rows on the red roof of the granary sunning themselves in the sweet May sunshine, and the sole occupants of the farmyard below were an old grey pony with paniers, dozing peacefully with his feet imbedded in the clean yellow straw, an infant asleep in one of the paniers.

"Mattie Renshawe come for some more new-laid eggs," observed Ellison to herself, but she spoke aloud, for the fine collie sitting erect beside her uttered a low whine of pleasure at his mistress's voice.

"Hush, Bairn, we must not wake the baby!" and the dog was at once silent, as though he understood her, and then he and his mistress resumed their quiet watching.

Someone once remarked that if he were asked who was the most contented woman he had ever known he should name Ellison Lee. "Of course," he went on, "in this sorry old world of ours there is no such thing as perfect contentment—the thing is impossible, an anomaly—altogether absurd—but if you wish me to name a person who is in thorough harmony with her environment, who has the

three greatest blessings ever vouchsafed to humanity—good sense, good temper and a good digestion—that person is my cousin once removed, Ellison Lee.”

Colonel Trevor was not alone in this opinion; most people admired and envied the young mistress of Brae Farm, and, indeed, if one were to add up her numerous advantages the list would be a fairly large one.

Young, for surely seven-and-twenty may be called young, with easy means, good health, and no encumbrances in the shape of idle brothers to be settled in the world, or troublesome young sisters; with a moderate share of good looks and sufficient cleverness to enable her to hold her own even in these days of multitudinous examinations and high culture, and, above all, with a natural aptitude for doing the right thing at the right moment, without selfish reserves or morbid dread of consequences—surely, with all these qualifications, Ellison Lee might be called a fortunate person. No; whatever were her faults—and most certainly she had her share of these in common with other true daughters of Eve—there was nothing morbid about her. One might wish perhaps that she had more imagination, that she were a little less satisfied with her own decisions; but these were merely specks and flaws to be smiled over and forgiven, for few unmarried women in her solitary independent circumstances could have given less occasion for the enemy to blaspheme.

“Yes—she is a bit proud, and she does not like to be contradicted,” Mrs. Drake, the blacksmith’s wife, would say to her gossips, “and when she has made up her mind there is no turning her; but at the bottom she is sound and sweet as the kernel of a nut, and there is no nonsense about her. I like a woman who has a head on her shoulders, and who can put down her foot when the right time comes. How do you suppose she would manage with that young bailiff, Sam Brattle, and all those men, if she was afraid of opening her mouth and putting down her foot?—and it is a solid foot too!”

The mistress of Brae Farm was an authority in Highlands, although that favoured little place, set so snugly in its cup-like hollow amid heather-covered hills and climbing fir-woods, had half a dozen big houses scattered here and there—Brae House to wit, and Redlands, and Price’s Folly, not to mention Ferncliffe, where the Langhams lived; but, nevertheless, Miss Lee at Brae Farm could hold her own even with her wealthier neighbours.

Ellison Lee was certainly no beauty, but her face was a pleasant one. She was a tall, strong young woman, somewhat heavily moulded, but she carried herself well; she had calm, serious blue eyes, that always looked straight at one, and the smooth coils of light brown hair set off a well-shaped head. People always called her a fine woman, and somehow the term suited her. She had matured early, and never thought or spoke of herself as a girl.

"I always envy Ellison her repose of manner," Mrs. Trevor would say; "she is the most restful person I know; nothing ever flurries her; my pet name for her is 'Fairy Order,' and as I often tell you, Gavin could not do better," and here a glance of mutual understanding would pass between the ladies. Highlands, in spite of its being an earthly paradise, was not free from the gossip and tittle-tattle and small babblement common to a village.

Highlands had long ago made up its mind that Colonel Trevor would one day marry Ellison Lee. His wife had been dead more than eight years. He was forty at least; very young ladies were not to his taste—he never knew how to say pretty things to them—and the friendship between him and his cousin was a deep and true one.

When Mrs. Earnshaw of Price's Folly walked up to the Brae Mrs. Trevor would speak quite openly, for being old school-fellows, they were great cronies. "You see, Hermione," she would say, "now Gavin has retired from active service he ought to marry again and settle down. A man wants more than a mother and sister. Ellison suits him down to the ground, every one can see what he thinks of her."

"Yes, and their lands march together," returned her companion sympathetically. "It would be a fine thing for the Colonel to have the Brae lands united; he would leave a grand estate to his children."

"Aren't we counting our chickens before they are hatched?" observed Mrs. Trevor, smiling, and then she sighed; her infant grandson lay with his young mother in an Indian grave.

While the two ladies sat and gossiped softly over the Colonel's future in the pleasant Brae drawing-room, Colonel Trevor was revolving the same thoughts as he rode up the long meadow, with his face set as usual in the direction of the Brae Farm, where Ellison was waiting for him at the green gate.

Gavin Trevor was a thin, soldierly-looking man; he had a brown weather-beaten face, and a dark moustache; but the hair on his temples was already turning grey; he had keen searching eyes that could soften pleasantly at times, and the slight brusquerie of manner that strangers noticed at first soon wore off when people knew him better. To a close observer his face bore traces of past troubles. He had married early, and his choice had been a fortunate one, and for two years he considered himself the happiest of men. He loved his profession, he was respected and liked in the regiment, and he and his wife were looked upon as a model couple.

When she died, and he stood beside the bed and looked at her with the dark downy head of their new-born child nestled close to her cold breast, the springs of happiness seemed to dry up within him, and he went out of that death-chamber a stricken man.

But he struggled on bravely, and in a year or two people began to say that Major Trevor would marry again, but he only frowned when any such hint reached his ears.

Death had been rife in the regiment, and he got his promotion early; but soon afterwards he had an attack of the deadly Indian fever, and though he fought it gallantly, and stuck to his post, there were recurring attacks, and his doctor began to look grave; sorrow had undermined the fine constitution, and he was no longer fit for his work.

"You must go back to England, Colonel, and be sharp about it too, if you do not want to be buried here," for Doctor Morton could speak the truth brutally when he chose, and he chose to do so now.

"Do you mean that I shall never be fit for active service again," asked Trevor sharply; "speak plainly, man, for Heaven's sake."

"I mean that India has played the deuce with you, and it will be years before you are quite to rights again. Take my advice, Colonel; you are young yet, go back to England and settle down quietly for a year or two." He was going to say "get a wife," but a look in his patient's eyes checked him. "Take life easier and you will make an old man yet," and though Colonel Trevor pooh-poohed him as an alarmist, he took his advice in the end.

During his long absence in India, his father had died; he was now the owner of the Brae, and there on his return he found his widowed mother and his sister Muriel. When the first few months had passed, and the sweet country air had already told favourably on him, and he looked less hollow-eyed and emaciated, Mrs. Trevor suggested that the Dower House, as it was called, a comfortable, unpretentious house about a mile away, should be put in order for her and Muriel.

"I do not mean that we should go and live there now, and leave you alone in this great house, Gavin," she continued somewhat alarmed by the same stony look in his dark eyes that Dr. Morton had noticed. "But the Dower House is in such a dilapidated state—Robinson was saying so when he came over here—it will take months to make it really habitable."

"Yes, mother, I am well aware of that. I meant to speak to Robinson myself, and have it done up next spring for letting; that is, if you will give me permission to do so. Ellison agreed with me that it would be a good investment."

"But if you let it, Gavin, what is to become of me and Muriel? The poor girl is not likely to marry—you must see that for yourself—and if you ever— Don't frown so, Gavin! poor dear Helen has been dead over five years now, and she would be the first to wish you to be happy."

"Mother!" returned Gavin hoarsely, "you mean it well, of course, I know that, and I am not going to be such a fool as to quarrel with you; but if you love me, you will never drop this sort of hint again. A man knows best how to manage his own affairs; we will leave the question of the Dower House for you and Muriel until I seriously

make up my mind to marry again ; to the best of my belief that day will never come."

And so the Dower House was done up and decorated from garret to basement, and re-christened Ferncliffe, and in due course of time a tenant for it was found ; and though three years more had elapsed since that conversation, Mrs. Trevor still remained mistress of the Brae, and still gossiped gently to her crony, Mrs. Earnshaw, of the time when Gavin would at last make up his mind to marry again, and she and Muriel would have to turn out and live in the Dower House.

Colonel Trevor was reviewing the last three years as he rode slowly up the Darley Road ; his reins had dropped on the mare's neck ; on the whole, the review was a satisfactory one. He had grown stronger, and had almost attained his normal condition of health. Though the old energy and pluck were wanting, he no longer fretted for his work ; though he still kept up his interest in his old regiment, he had grown reconciled to his quiet, country life ; it suited him, and he found plenty of occupation ; and then it was so near town, he could run up to his club whenever he wished, and be in touch with the last new question of the day ; when he was to be met so often in St. James's and Piccadilly, no one could accuse him of being buried alive.

"Yes, I have not had a bad time," went on Gavin, thinking, as he had often done before, how much comfort of mind and hours of pleasant, kindly companionship he owed to Ellison. From the first she had been his trusty comrade and friend ; her tact and strong common sense had often helped him over the rough places of daily life.

It was rather difficult to avoid friction with his mother. Mrs. Trevor was a warm-hearted, affectionate woman, but she was oversensitive and excitable, and Muriel "was a thing of moods and tenses," as her cousin once observed. Gavin never professed to understand his sister, though he was very kind to her ; but he could talk freely on all subjects to Ellison.

He waved his hand to her gaily the next moment, and then he lifted his hat, and Ellison leaned over the gate to pat Miss Alice's glossy brown neck, while Bairn leapt up against the bars with joyous barks of welcome.

"She is in splendid condition, Gavin," observed Ellison, looking at the mare with critical approving eyes. "Sam Brattle was right when he advised you to buy her ; it is sometimes cheapest to pay a long figure for a thing you want."

"I paid a precious long figure for Miss Alice," laughed Colonel Trevor ; "but in spite of her skittishness, I would not part with her for double her price ; she is like the rest of her sex, full of tricks, and with plenty of virtues. Well, Ellison, how long are you going to keep that gate shut ? Is not the mistress of Brae Farm at home this afternoon ?"

Ellison drew back slowly, but there was a slight blush on her fair sedate face.

"I am always at home to my friends, Gavin, and I have so much to tell you ; will you take Miss Alice round to the stable—you will find some one about—and I will go in and make tea."

CHAPTER II.

COLONEL TREVOR IS SURPRISED.

As Colonel Trevor led his mare away, Ellison walked quickly back to the house.

It was an irregular low grey house, without any pretension ; but in summer-time its weather-beaten old walls were smothered in creepers. Glorious *gloire de dijon* roses peeped in at the bedroom windows ; honeysuckle and starry clematis draped the stone porch, and clusters of blue-grey wisteria festooned the dairy window.

All round the house lay a delightful old garden, for it was one of Ellison's peculiarities that she would cultivate none but old-fashioned flowers.

Rows of white and orange lilies and gorgeous hollyhocks lined the border, with deep blue delphiniums and the humbler larkspur ; heart-shaped beds of small yellow and purple pansies studded the lawn, and straggling masses of London pride and sweet-smelling pinks were everywhere. All the summer long it was a garden of delights. The air would be fragrant with the heavy scent of syringa and the spicy fragrance of the deep red carnations. How the bees and birds loved that garden ! There were nests by the score in the shrubbery that led to the kitchen garden, and the row of bee-hives under the south wall—where the peaches grew—brought in a goodly amount of honey. All round the house and gardens lay a ring of sloping meadows, and from her bedroom window Ellison could catch a glimpse of the chimneys of the Brae House, and beyond that the dark foliage of the Brae woods.

From early spring to late autumn the front door always stood open. Through the porch one passed into a small square hall, somewhat dark from its heavy wainscoting. In winter a glorious fire burnt in the big open grate, but in summer it was filled with honesty, or branches of may and rhododendron ; an oak settle black with age, a grandfather's clock, and a chest big enough to hold the unfortunate bride in "The Mistletoe Bough," gave it an air of comfort. On one side of the hall was the dining-room, on the other Ellison's sitting-room ; two red-baized doors shut off the staircase and the other offices.

Ellison's sitting-room—for she always sternly refused to call it her drawing-room—was a long handsome room, extending from the front to the back of the house. One could not look round it without recognising at once that it was the heart and nucleus of the home,

that it was the living-room of its mistress ; every corner had traces of her taste and various occupations. The wall was lined with book-cases, chiefly filled with standard works of a solid description ; fiction, except in the shape of Dickens, and Thackeray, and Sir Walter Scott, was not largely represented ; clearly utility, not sentiment or imagination, was the salient characteristic of the young mistress of Brae Farm.

A writing-table and a business-like looking bureau, bristling with papers stood at one end. This was where Ellison wrote her letters and kept her weekly accounts. A Japanese screen shut off this part of the room. A couch, a round table, and two or three comfortable-looking chairs filled up the centre, and the deep front bay-window, with its cushioned seat and small square tea-table, was evidently where Ellison entertained her friends. There were no useless nicknacks to be seen anywhere, only the shelves of fine old china near the fireplace, and one or two good pictures gave it the colouring it needed. It was in this room that Ellison lived her busy useful life—except for meals she never entered her dining-room unless it was to interview her bailiff, Sam Brattle ; her humbler visitors and pensioners were always received in a small room leading out of the kitchen, called the still-room. There stood the great presses and cupboards where Ellison kept her groceries, and jams and wonderful syrups, and the small stock of drugs that were always at her neighbours' service.

The nearest doctor lived at Bramfield, two miles away ; even when his services were urgently needed, it might be hours before he returned from his rounds to receive the message. The villagers in Highlands doctored themselves and their children a great deal with Miss Lee's help. It was through her exertions that the National Health Committee sent down a lecturer to deliver a course on "First Aid to the Injured and Sick," in the Tron-room below the vicarage which was called the Institute, that had been built by the late Mr. Trevor as a thank-offering for his wife's recovery from a dangerous illness.

When Ellison's small stock of drugs were exhausted, they could always be procured at Tom Brattle's, or Brattles' as it was called. Tom was Sam Brattle's elder brother, and drove a thriving trade in Highlands. You might buy anything at Brattles'—from a straw hat and a cambric dress to moist sugar and onions, or a pennyworth of sweets. Books, photographs, music, bacon, and fat pork ; ginger-beer and every kind of children's toys, beads, soap, and ribbons were all in this wholesale depôt for the village.

Although it was May, a small bright fire was burning cheerily in the sitting-room, and a kettle was singing lustily on its trivet. When Ellison had made the tea out of the old-fashioned tea-caddy that stood ready to hand, she rang for the hot cakes, of which there was always a liberal supply at Brae Farm ; then she took her usual seat and began moving the cups in a careful methodical way, and every now

and then glancing towards the gate. "Gavin was a long time," she thought; "surely Joe Brand must be in the yard;" then a smile came to her lips as she saw the Colonel's tall spare figure approaching the house.

"Well, this is pleasant," he said, looking round him contentedly as he threw himself down on the window seat opposite Ellison. "I never knew any room to beat this for comfort. I often make my mother cross by telling her so. You know you love it yourself, Ellison. Would you change it for one of ours at the Brae? No; I thought so"—as she shook her head; "the drawing-rooms are too big for comfort, and the library too dark; the morning-room is so-so, but the billiard-room is a barrack; as for my sanctum——"

"Now, Gavin," interrupted his cousin, "how can you have the baseness to find fault with all those beautiful rooms? The drawing-rooms are charming! they beat Redlands, and as for Price's Folly, they could put two of their rooms into one of yours. It is simply blarney to be praising up my poor sitting-room at their expense; let me give you some more milk—that tea is too strong—but you kept me so long waiting."

"I suppose people's ideas of comfort differ," he returned, as he held out his cup, "but you always seem so snug, I suppose because you live here from morning to night; now my mother spends her mornings in the octagon room, or in her big dressing-room, and her afternoons and evenings in the inner drawing-room, only sometimes she takes a fancy to use the other one; in fact, you never know where to find her."

"I see what you mean," replied Ellison, as she unrolled a large piece of knitting; this was one of her habits, never to let her fingers be idle while she talked; countless were the socks and crossovers and comforters she knitted during stray quarters-of-an-hour. "Yes, I know I do love my sitting-room, but I have never enjoyed it more than during the last six weeks."

"For shame, Ellison—poor Miss Lockwood! After all, she was a good-natured, harmless creature."

"Ah, you may call her that, if you like. Letitia was not without her good points. She certainly made herself extremely useful, and her needlework was beautiful; but how was one to endure her endless chatter and trivialities? You know very well, Gavin, that Cousin Louise often declared it would have driven her wild to be in my place."

"Yes, I know; from morning to night—"

"It was Letty's delight
To chatter and talk without stopping,' etc., etc."

"No, but seriously I never knew I had nerves before; but I understand now what you mean when you say you feel quite jumpy. I

was prickly all over. If it had only been sensible talk, but it was everlasting chit-chat; the droning of a wasp, or the buzzing of a blue-bottle against the glass, would have conveyed as much sense to my mind. No, no; Letitia Lockwood is a good woman and an excellent Christian, but she has the smallest amount of brain-power that I ever knew in any woman. I was obliged to tell her, at last, that we did not suit each other. Poor soul, she had a good cry over what she called my hard-heartedness and want of feeling; but if you knew how delicious my first solitary evening was to me."

"But Ellison," looking at her keenly, "has not my mother convinced you yet that you are too young to live alone?"

"No one would ever convince me of that," returned Ellison obstinately, "but I am willing to give in for the sake of peace. Besides," her decided tone faltering a little, "my dear father always wished me to have a companion; he told me the night he was taken ill, that at my age it was better not to brave conventionality. Poor old dad! I daresay he was right."

"And you are looking out for someone to replace Miss Lockwood?"

"No," she returned quietly, "there is no need for me to look out. My cousin, Lorraine Herbert, needs help; her husband died about a year and a half ago. She is in sadly straitened circumstances, and I have offered a home to her and her child."

Colonel Trevor looked extremely surprised. He was well aware that Ellison never asked advice, and that she seldom mentioned any fresh arrangement until she had made up her mind that it was feasible and desirable. She had too much backbone and decision of character to talk over pros and cons in the usual feminine fashion; nevertheless, in his masculine judgment, this was rather a serious step to take; surely it would have been better to have spoken to his mother first.

For the moment he felt hurt; but not wishing to show this he said quickly:

"Lorraine Herbert—have I ever heard the name? She must be a cousin on your mother's side, then?"

"She is my first cousin, and therefore my nearest relative; her name was Broughton before she married. Surely you have heard me mention uncle Philip, who was so unfortunate and died abroad?" But Colonel Trevor shook his head.

"You forget how many years I have been in India—possibly my mother may have heard the name of Broughton; but since I have been home, there has been no mention of them."

"It seems odd to you, no doubt, but the fact is, Lorraine and I are perfect strangers to each other. Uncle Philip lived abroad, partly on account of his health and partly because of reduced circumstances—he was always Murad the Unlucky of the family. Then Lorraine married and settled in Ireland, and until three weeks ago we never met."

"You know nothing of her, and yet you are offering her a home; is this your usual prudence, Ellison?" Colonel Trevor's voice had a note of anxiety in it.

"At least I know that she is Uncle Philip's daughter, and my next of kin, and that she and her child are in danger of starving," she replied quietly. "I see you are put out, Gavin, because I have not spoken to you or Cousin Louise, but you know what I have often said to you: unless one is lame one does not need crutches, and as long as I have reason and judgment I can manage my own business."

The words might have sounded brusque, if they had not been accompanied by a bright smile; but Colonel Trevor was not to be propitiated by a smile; he was tenacious, perhaps a trifle obstinate by nature—his mother always said so—and he was determined to get to the bottom of the matter. To be sure, his opinion had not been asked, but his friendship for Ellison made him anxious to protect her if possible from taking a wrong line of action.

On her side Ellison was secretly amused, and yet touched by Gavin's evident anxiety, but at the same time she thought he might have trusted her judgment. Was she the sort of person to do an impulsive thing? It was not to please herself that she was offering this home to her widowed cousin, for in her heart she knew that it was a self-sacrificing action, and one that she had been reluctant to perform. Altruism does not flourish naturally in some soils, and Ellison by no means desired her cousin to live with her; but, as she said to Colonel Trevor later on, how was she to engage a stranger when poor Lorraine needed a home; when duty was staring her in the face how was she to refuse it and yet call herself a Christian?

"I could not have eaten my bread in comfort if I had not done it," she went on. "I could not have slept peacefully after seeing her and the child in that miserable garret; but I did not act impulsively. I came home, and thought over it for a week,"—she might have added truly, "and prayed over it," for Ellison was deeply religious, though she was too reserved to express her deeper feeling—"but it was no good shirking the question, it was a plain duty and I could not turn my back on it."

"What put it in your head to go and see her, Ellison?"

"She wrote to me. She had wanted to write for months, but she could not find my address. She had never seen me or my home; but of course she knew that she had a cousin. She found the address at last on an old letter father had written to Uncle Philip, and then she wrote at once. I liked the letter, there was no humbug about it; it was quite simple and direct to the point. Her husband was dead, and she and her little boy were in great distress; and she utterly without friends. The address was Beaumont Street, Camden Town."

"And you went to her at once?"

"Yes—the very next day. I telegraphed that I was coming. You

were in town, so you knew nothing about it. Am I wearying you, or do you want to hear everything?"

"Everything," was his terse answer. "You know all your affairs interest me."

"You are very good to me," she returned gently. "Do you know Camden Town, Gavin?" And as he nodded: "Ah, but you are not well acquainted with Beaumont Street. How can people live their lives in such places? how can they be good and patient and love their children, and not hate the hour they were born? Oh, I am speaking strongly, I know," as he merely elevated his eye-brows at this; "but if you had only seen the street, the black railway-arch at one end, and the unkempt children playing in the road, and the draggled women and the dingy homes with their dismal areas and windows that looked as though they were never cleaned, you would not wonder at my disgust. The very sunshine was less bright in Beaumont Street."

"And Mrs. Herbert was living in this desirable neighbourhood?"

"Yes, she had been lodging there for five months—such a lodging—a bedroom at the top of the house, with a view of the opposite chimney pots. And here I found Lorraine and her baby boy, and a miserable little tabby kitten that she had rescued from starvation, and from the cruel mercies of the street. By-the-bye," interrupting herself, "I have promised to give the kitten a home too."

"You are a good woman, Ellison; I always said so. But go on. Your story is deeply interesting, and you are telling it very well. I want you to describe your cousin."

"Let me say a word about the room first. Shabby little place as it was, it was so neat, you could tell at once that a lady lived in it—and Lorraine's appearance was as neat, too. She has left off her widow's dress—white collars and cuffs were luxuries that could be dispensed with—but her gown was black, of course."

"Is she younger or older than you, Ellison?"

"Older by three years. Lorraine is thirty, but she does not look her age. She is not exactly good-looking, but her face is pleasing. I should call her interesting. She is tall and rather thin and pale; but she has nice eyes and lovely hair—that red-brown hair that looks auburn in the sunshine. Her boy is like her. He is rather a delicate little fellow, not pretty, but very engaging. Of course Lorraine dotes on him. He was only nine months old when his father died."

"I suppose she talked a great deal about her husband?"

"Yes, she told me everything in the frankest possible way. She is like her letter—very simple and direct. She did not wait for me to ask her questions, but told me all I wanted to know."

"She has had a hard life. When her father died—he died at Lausanne—she went to Ireland with a family, who had been staying in a *pension* near them, as governess to the two girls."

"The O'Briens were kind-hearted people, and she was fairly

comfortable with them, and might have remained so; but in an evil day she made the acquaintance of a young artist—Ralph Herbert—and, after a few months, was induced to marry him.

"It was a rash and most imprudent marriage. Lorraine frankly owned this at once. She was not in love with Ralph Herbert, still at that time she believed in him. She knew that he was poor, but he told her that he had some orders coming in, and that, as he was utterly free from debt, they could live comfortably in a quiet way. Lorraine had no wish to leave the O'Briens, and she pleaded for a longer engagement; but Ralph told her that his love for her was impeding his work, that he was too restless to paint, and that, after they were once married, he would settle down and make a name for himself.

"When I asked her how she could bring herself to marry a man of whose antecedents she was nearly ignorant, and whom she confessed she did not really love, she told me that he seemed so lonely and unhappy that she longed to comfort him. 'I belonged to no one, and Ralph needed me; and then he had such a way with him,' she finished.

"Poor Lorraine! Before many months were over she had reason to rue her imprudence. Ralph Herbert was a man who did not know how to speak the truth; when he told her he had no debts he had lied to her freely. Before they had been married six months there was an execution in the house, and their furniture was seized. They led a wandering Bohemian life after this, never staying long in any place, and always, as she feared, leaving debts behind them.

"Nothing she could say to him seemed of any avail; he had simply no sense of honour; she hinted to me in a guarded sort of way that he had other vices. 'I know he cared for me to the last,' she said mournfully, 'but I never really influenced him; if he had not died we should have gone from bad to worse, for how was I to leave him, and he the father of my boy?' It went to my heart to hear her.

"Just before he died a small windfall came to him in the shape of a couple of hundred pounds; this enabled her to bury him decently and pay a few of the most pressing debts. Her health had suffered from the strain of nursing him, and for some months she was unable to do anything. There were doctors' bills to pay and other expenses, and her money began to dwindle.

"It was impossible to resume her teaching, for she could not leave her boy. Soon after Christmas she was obliged to give up her comfortable rooms for the attic I found her in when she wrote to me. Things were at their lowest ebb, and she was keeping herself and the boy by taking in plain work; a shop in Camden Town employed her, and she was thankful to be enabled in this way to keep a respectable roof over her head."

"Poor soul," returned Colonel Trevor, "what a tragic story; but I fear there are many similar cases. There are no end of improvident marriages, even in other ranks of life; many a respectable young couple, who have taken their responsibilities too early, without counting the cost, have laid up a heritage of poverty and misery for their children. I know many such stories."

"So do I, but the grimness of the reality never strikes us so forcibly as when we hear it from the person's own lips. When Lorraine told me that she had tasted nothing but bread and weak tea since the previous morning, I could not keep the tears out of my eyes, and yet I am not an imaginative woman. I think I never enjoyed anything more than watching her eat a mutton chop. It really did me good."

Colonel Trevor's eyes lingered on Ellison's face with quiet tenderness; it always rested him to look at her and hear her talk. Her calmness and absence of all excitability or exaggeration pleased and satisfied him, but at this moment he had a glimpse of a deeper underlying goodness. How quietly she was telling her story; she was making so little of her own sacrifice. It was her duty to shelter her next-of-kin, that was how she had put it, but she had said nothing at all of her own trouble and inconvenience.

"And when does your cousin come to you?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"Next week—Wednesday I think. I could not fix an earlier date, as I had to re-paint and re-paper the rooms I have set apart for her and the boy. She has begged me to keep my spare room intact for chance guests, for of course I talked things over with her on my second visit, but the room she will have is a very pleasant one and has the same outlook as mine. Why are you looking at me so solemnly, Gavin?"

"I am only thinking what a good woman you are," he returned quietly as he put his hand over hers, "and God bless all such women, I say." And then he rose as though to take his leave.

CHAPTER III.

LORRAINE.

It was on a fresh lovely afternoon in May when Lorraine Herbert sat in the railway compartment, with her boy in her lap, looking out dreamily at the flying hedgerows, and counting the milestones as she passed them.

In another quarter of an hour they would reach Bramfield, where her cousin would be waiting for her on the platform. Lorraine felt as though she were in some dream; could it be true that these

months of misery were over? Beaumont Street with its sordid surroundings was already a thing of the past—that she was entering on another chapter of her strange life history?

What a chequered and changeful life hers had been; those years of girlhood spent in foreign cities, picking up a desultory education—much as the birds pick up their crumbs of sustenance. Now she was learning embroidery and French at a convent, under the tutelage of placid meek-eyed nuns, or studying German with a stout, placid, little Frau Hoffman, who lived in the flat above them; or adding up sums, and listening to fragments of Kant's philosophy, from the lips of old Professor Schreiber, who took snuff and used a huge red handkerchief, and who was exceedingly kind and patient, with "die Engländer Mädchen." It was a desultory and aimless life for a girl to lead; but it was not without its pleasures. Those summer evenings, for example, when they sat in the park at Brussels, listening to the music of the band, while the stars came out above their heads, or had ices and coffee in the place, and watched the children dancing under the trees, and she had longed to dance too.

Then there were the friends who had been so good to her, the pastor and his wife at Lausanne, and the little French widow, and the Englishman and his tall daughters whom they had met at the *pension*; but indeed it would have been impossible to enumerate all her friends. Lorraine, who was sociable by nature, had pleasant acquaintances in every town or village that she visited. "Thou wilt never want for friends, dear child," an old Quaker lady had once said to her, "for thy loving nature will draw affection to thee, as the honey in the flower draws the bee."

Lorraine always told herself that she had been happier than most girls; she loved her father dearly, and their free wandering life had suited her. "When I was a wee child, I always thought I should like to be a gipsy, and live in a caravan," she would say to her friends; "but going about with my father is just as nice, if we only had a little more money; but there, it is no use crying for the moon," she would finish merrily, for she had a light heart, and made the best of everything. To her joyous nature, it was intense pleasure only to be alive and feel the sunshine; and all things, sunshine and rain, hail and snow, winter and summer, and night and day, were to her the good gifts of God, and after a different fashion, she enjoyed them all.

With her father's death, her bright, unthinking girlhood had come to an end; but after a time her buoyant nature asserted itself. "I can never be sad long," she would sometimes say, and, indeed, sadness was at all times foreign to her. It never became habitual, as in some morbid natures. For a time the cruel pressure of circumstances might crush her as a daisy is crushed under foot, but when the foot-step has passed on, the daisy raises its head again, and Lorraine's nature was singularly elastic.

Lorraine had been perfectly frank with her cousin, but instinctive

generosity made her say as little as possible about her husband's vices. "My married life was just a gloomy tunnel," she said to Ellison later on, "but one could at times see the sunshine. I never quite lost courage, though I suffered horribly at times. I was sorry for Ralph, but he killed the little love I had for him. I came to the conclusion that he was warped in some way, poor fellow; he did not seem to see things as I saw them, and when he did a mean thing, he was never ashamed of it." But neither then nor afterwards did she enlarge on this dark portion of her life, though she would talk for an hour together of those months in Beaumont Street, and of her hardships and struggles.

"Weariness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning," thought Lorraine, as her glistening eyes rested on the green meadows, where the lambs were frolicking about their woolly mothers. "How am I ever to be grateful enough to my cousin?"

Ellison's fair serious face and quiet blue eyes had seemed almost angelic to her that day as they sat together by the window overlooking the sooty chimney-pots, with Waif and the boy playing at their feet, but there had been no impulsive offer of help at first.

"You are my cousin, Lorraine, I have no nearer relative, it was right that you should send for me in your trouble; we must see what is to be done." And then food had been sent for, and when Lorraine had finished her meal, Ellison had placed a five-pound note in her hand, and had promised to come again in a week's time.

Lorraine tried not to feel disappointed when Ellison had left her; she was a dear woman she said to herself, a ministering angel; but she wished she had kissed her at parting. Lorraine, lonely and unnerved, longed to throw her arms round Ellison's neck. "She is good, she is true, she will not fail me, but she is undemonstrative," she thought as she took up her work again, but every day she counted the hours until Ellison came again.

"I have thought things over," observed Ellison, in her quiet leisurely way, as soon as she had seated herself on her second visit. "I live alone, and the house is roomy. Will you come to me, Lorraine, and bring your boy, and make Brae Farm your home?"

"My home! For always, do you mean? A home for me and baby boy?" And when Ellison said "Yes," Lorraine had utterly broken down, and wept passionately. At that moment Ellison felt that she had done well.

"On Wednesday, the sixteenth, I shall expect you," were her parting words. "I will write all my directions about the journey; and, Lorraine, if you want any more money for yourself or the boy, I can spare you some." But Lorraine shook her head.

"You have given me plenty. We will not disgrace you, Ellison. I will set about a new frock for my boy at once." And then a warm kiss had passed between them, for, with all Ellison's reserve, it

was impossible not to thaw under Lorraine's loving expressions of gratitude. "You are my good angel, Ellison!"

"I would rather be your good friend, Lorraine; angels are not in my line at all." And then she lifted Theodore in her arms, and, as she kissed the thin, pale little face, she suddenly remembered a baby brother who had died. Poor wee Willie! How she had grieved for him! "This little fellow will look all the better for country air," she said kindly; "he is not half heavy enough for his age." And it was then that Lorraine put in a petition for the kitten, to which Ellison had graciously acceded.

Lorraine's vivid imagination was taking a bird's-eye view of her past life; but, as the train slackened speed, she was recalled to the present again, and, putting down her boy, she rose and looked eagerly out of the window.

Yes, there was Ellison, in her closely-fitting blue serge and little black hat, looking as serene and cheerful as ever, with a splendid brown-and-white collie beside her. She nodded and smiled as she met Lorraine's eyes.

"You are in capital time," she said, as she lifted out Theodore. "I have not been waiting more than five minutes. Will you point out your luggage, Lorraine?" And then they went together to the luggage van.

"There are all mine and Tedo's earthly belongings," observed Lorraine, in a whispered aside to her cousin, as the porter dragged out a large shabby trunk and a smaller tin box; but Ellison took no notice of this speech.

"Take them up in the cart, Joe," she observed to a grey-haired groom in undress livery, who was waiting on the platform. And then Lorraine gave up her ticket and they went out of the station.

There was a small open waggonette standing before the door, with a strong, handsome brown mare in the shafts. Ellison assisted her cousin and lifted in the boy, then she mounted the driving-seat.

"Let the mare go, and jump in, Daniel!" she said to a small apple-cheeked lad in a grey suit; and Daniel seated himself bashfully at the extreme edge of the waggonette. For some time Lorraine watched him anxiously; she felt so sure that he would fall out. But Daniel was used to balancing himself in perilous positions, and he was perpetually clambering in and out of the waggonette to open and shut gates.

Ellison drove on rapidly; but now and then she pointed with her whip to some interesting landmark. "There is Price's Folly," she said suddenly, when they had passed through three or four open gates, and had driven through some long park-like meadows. "The Earnshaws live there; they are very pleasant people—Admiral Earnshaw and his wife; they have three sons, but they are all abroad. Do you see the house, Lorraine?"

Lorraine answered in the affirmative ; she had good eyes, and could well discern the old-fashioned irregular house lying in the wooded hollow.

"You never told me how beautiful it was !" exclaimed Lorraine in almost an injured voice. But Ellison only laughed.

"I wanted you to find out the beauties for yourself ; and I was never good at description. Steady, Mollie, old girl ! It is not nearly tea-time yet, and we are in no hurry. I hope you are not nervous, Lorraine ; Mollie is a little fresh this afternoon." But Lorraine returned truly that she loved going fast.

They had left the meadows now, and were driving down lovely wooded lanes. Now and then they passed a comfortable-looking cottage, or a bit of broken land wooded with Scotch fir, larch, and pine ; then came another gate.

"This is Highlands," observed Ellison ; and Lorraine stood up in the waggonette and silently gazed over her cousin's shoulder.

Below them lay the village—the cottages with their brown roofs and red tilings nestling among grassy slopes and fir woods—a range of low hills closed the horizon, later on they would be purple with heather. On one side the pine woods seemed to climb the hill rather steeply, and on their left hand were the church and vicarage and another and less sombre wood. A broken common with cattle feeding upon it lay directly before them and seemed to stretch from one end of the village to the other.

"Do you like it, Lorraine ? is it not a charming view ? I am so fond of our dear little Highlands. Do you see that gate yonder with two or three cottages beside it ? Our nearest way to the farm would be through that gate and down Fernleigh Lane ; but if you are not tired we will drive through the Brae woods ; there they are behind the vicarage ; you can see the Lodge and the gate from here."

"Ah, yes, do let us go there !" exclaimed Lorraine. "I have never seen a village like this in England—it looks like an earthly paradise. Oh, how good people ought to be who live here."

"People are much the same everywhere," returned Ellison prosaically. "Human nature has its faults in Highlands as well as Camden Town." Then, as Lorraine shivered slightly as though a cold wind had suddenly passed over her, Daniel opened the gate and Ellison drove slowly up the steep broken path, talking all the time. "Strangers are always rather surprised when they first see Highlands," she remarked. "One or two have asked me where the village really is, because they can only see a few scattered houses, but in reality there are thirty or forty cottages within two miles of the church ; and we have at least nine or ten good private houses, though Brae House and Redlands carry off the palm ; and there are two or three comfortable farmhouses besides. In fact, Highlands is an exceptionally favoured little place."

"It must be very healthy."

"Yes, indeed ; and however hot the summer is we have always a

breeze. As nothing is ever perfect in this life, I am bound to tell you that in the late autumn we occasionally get a good deal of mist, for the place is high and catches the clouds; but often Highlands is in sunshine when the weald below is in fog. There, I will pull up a moment and you can just look down what I suppose I must call the main street—though street properly there is none. There is Brattles' our Universal Provider, the Whiteley of Highlands; that white cottage with the red double-peaked roof belongs to Drake the blacksmith. Mrs. Drake is a great friend of mine, I will tell you about her by-and-by; it is a good-sized cottage and they let lodgings. Just below is the *Waggon and Horses*, our one inn, and then comes our cobbler, and a few more cottages. The door of the *Waggon and Horses*, and those white palings before the forge, are the favourite resorts of the rustic youth of Highlands, and on Sunday afternoons you may see them thick as crows lining the palings; they do absolutely nothing as far as I know, neither talk nor smoke; but they look perfectly happy."

"And you have lived in this lovely place all your life, Ellison!"

"Yes, my dear; and one day I hope to be buried in that pretty churchyard. Ah, I see baby boy is asleep, and I must drive on; but there seems so much to show you. There is our institute, Lorraine, the iron room standing alone; now we are going to turn into the Brae woods. An old servant of my father, lives at the lodge—my cousin Gavin gave her the place."

Lorraine uttered a little cry of irrepressible delight at the sight of the charming woodland road, that wound through the chase, bordered with spruce firs and other coniferous and ornamental trees and shrubs. Clumps of rhododendrons were here and there; then came a group of cedars; every now and then there were snug copses and a view of tangled undergrowth; the right side was closed in by the same range of hills that bounded the village; but on the left there were winding walks, sedulously cultivated, leading to a broad expanse of open meadowland.

"There's Brae House, through those new gates we are passing," observed Ellison. "I think I told you about my cousins the Trevors of Brae? All this part of Highlands belongs to my cousin, Colonel Trevor. Brae Farm was always the property of one branch of the family, and is now in my possession. You cannot see it just yet; the trees hide it; but in a moment, we shall come to it."

But Lorraine did not answer her; she leaned back in her seat almost wearily, and pressed her sleeping boy closer to her breast; in her grateful heart she was saying to herself: "He hath led me by paths that I have not known. And Theo, my precious baby, to think that this is to be our home!"

CHAPTER IV.

"GOOD REST."

"WELCOME home, Lorraine," and Ellison's warm friendly grasp seemed to accentuate her words. The kisses and smooth caresses of other women never came readily to her; she often said herself that she preferred as little demonstration as possible. "There is so much in a hand-shake," she would add; "there is nothing more characteristic; a warm heart and a cold, loose shake of the hand so seldom go together." There was no lack of feeling in Ellison's firm pressure of her cousin's hand, and a great deal of kindness in her voice, as she said simply, "I will do my best to make you happy, dear; and I am sure that when we know each other better that we shall be good friends."

"Thank you," returned Lorraine, in a low voice, but her lips trembled and she could say no more; she instinctively felt that any emotional speech would jar on Ellison. Her own heart-beats warned her that she was growing agitated, so she walked to the window and looked out for a moment, until she had swallowed the lump in her throat and the dimness had passed from her eyes, then she said quietly, "What a dear room, Ellison!"

"So everyone says; but I am glad you like it. Look, that is your corner, Lorraine, and there is where I always sit in the evening. I am a regular old maid, and am terribly conservative in my habits. Now shall we go upstairs, and I will show you your room and Theodore's nursery—his playroom, I mean," as Lorraine looked at her a little anxiously; "a child wants a room where he can keep his toys and make a mess. I thought when he got older we could put him a little bed in there."

"You think of everything," returned Lorraine, gratefully; and then they passed through, out of the red baized doors, and up a broad, low staircase with quaintly carved balustrades, the landing-place being furnished with another dark oak chest and some fine blue dragon china. The bedrooms opened on a wide airy passage, but what at once arrested Lorraine's attention was an illuminated name over every door. Ellison paused as she noticed her cousin's surprise.

"All our rooms have names; it is an old custom at Brae Farm, and I have grown fond of it. 'Good rest,' that is your room, Lorraine; mine has always been 'Peace,' the spare room 'Hospitality.' The servants have some of the cardinal virtues inscribed over their doors: 'Charity,' 'Prudence,' 'Content,' 'Cheerfulness.' I was rather at a loss how to christen the nursery, but I have called it the 'Dovecote,' because the doves have a habit of sitting on that particular window-sill; they have taken a fancy to it, and there is no

good trying to drive them away. You can alter the name if you like, Lorraine; remember, my dear," laying her hand on her cousin's arm impressively, "you are absolutely mistress of these two rooms—you can change any arrangement that does not suit you without referring to me at all."

"There is no fear of my wanting to change anything," returned Lorraine impulsively, as she looked round the large cheerful room. All the furniture at the Brae Farm was old-fashioned. Lorraine's wardrobe, chest of drawers, and washstand were all of dark Spanish mahogany, and the dressing-table was covered with spotted muslin in the style of twenty years ago, only the brass bedstead and the cot beside it were recent purchases. But it was a charming room, nevertheless: a wide bay-window overlooked the lawn and the meadows, with a side glimpse of the granary and straw-stacks; an easy-chair and a writing-table stood within the bay. "Good rest," how well the name suited it, and again the young widow's heart swelled almost painfully within her.

Theodore had been sleeping heavily in his mother's arms all this time, but at this moment he woke up and, rubbing his eyes, began clamouring for his tea.

"Yes, Tedo, darling; but you must see your playroom first. May I take him in, Ellison?"

The "Dovecote" was flooded with the afternoon sunshine as they entered it, and through the open window the cooing of the doves was distinctly audible. It was a small room, but Ellison had taken great pains to fit it up for a child's use; there was a low table and chair, a high guard, a toy cupboard with a box of bricks already on the shelf, and a wooden horse, at the sight of which Tedo burst into a perfect shout of delight.

"Dorcas will bring you some warm water, Lorraine," said Ellison; "and when you and Tedo are ready you will find tea ready, too. We shall have it in the dining-room this evening on account of Tedo. By-the-bye, I forgot to tell you. Dorcas, that rosy-checked little damsel who brought me my letters, is the one to wait on you and Tedo; Ruth is my private attendant. I tell you these little things, Lorraine, that you may feel yourself at home," and then she nodded and withdrew.

How Lorraine longed for a quiet half hour, just to adjust her confused thoughts and to take stock, as it were, of this new strange feeling of happiness. But Tedo was tired and hungry, so she made haste to get rid of the dust, and then carried him downstairs; and a few minutes later he was sitting in his high chair between his mother and Ellison taking bread and jam with great gusto.

"I hope we shall not put you out of your usual habits," observed Lorraine, as she looked across the liberally spread tea-table at her cousin. The different kinds of bread-stuffs, cakes, and preserves filled her with amazement; there were new-laid eggs, too, and

some slices of delicate pink ham. Never had Lorraine tasted such cream and such butter; but she was extremely hungry, and did justice to the various delicacies.

Ellison went on chatting cheerfully about her household as they sat together in the twilight after tea; she had noticed the suppressed wistful look in Lorraine's eyes and guessed intuitively that she needed the relief of expression. "She is longing to pour out her heart to me," she said to herself. "Lorraine is terribly emotional, but to-night it is safer to talk on common-places; when she has had a night's sleep she will realise her position more soberly than I have," she continued musingly.

"She is thirty, a widow, and a mother, and has lived through the whole gamut of a woman's experience, and beside her I am only a big ignorant child—and yet while I take even this change in my domestic routine calmly, Lorraine's brown eyes seemed as though they were looking into a magnificent fairyland. She is on the verge of tears every moment from sheer happiness; but she has the self-control not to shed them. I shall help her best, and myself too, by talking about trifles; she is far too tired to-night to launch into any painful experiences."

Someone has justly said that we can only act truly if we act according to our nature, but for once Ellison's calm wisdom was at fault. If Lorraine could have put down her head on her cousin's shoulder and told her how she felt, she would not have shed those hysterical tears later on in her own room. No two natures were ever more dissimilar. Ellison, in spite of her goodness, was self-centred, and in an ordinary way could live without sympathy; her affections were strong and tenacious; change was impossible to her, and she was extremely loyal to those she loved, but the objects of her love were few.

Lorraine's nature was a very different one. As a mere child she would tell people that she had a big heart, and that she loved everybody. As she grew up her heart seemed to grow bigger too. Altruism was a passion with her—she was intensely human; her sympathies grew wide and more discriminating, and her own troubles only taught her to feel for other women whose lives were apparently failures. Those years of intercourse with a worthless and degraded mind had happily not contaminated her. It was as though she had possessed some secret specific that was an antidote to all poisonous suggestions; the moral leprosy of her husband's nature only filled her with pity. "Ralph was not good," she would say to herself, but she was sure that others were more to blame than he; he had not had his chance, poor fellow, for she had bewildered her woman's brains over the mysterious question of heredity; but in one sense it comforted her, for she had made up her mind that Ralph's ancestors were to blame for his vices.

And so, when her tired nerves had had the relief of tears, Lorraine lay down to sleep by her boy's side, a happy and grateful woman;

and Ellison, lying with wide open eyes in her pleasant chamber of peace, felt that quiet contentment that comes from a satisfied conscience, and from the memory of a good deed done in a right spirit. She then fell asleep sweetly, and dreamt that she was walking with Gavin in the Brae woods, and then woke to the sunshine and singing of birds.

CHAPTER V.

TEDO MAKES A NEW FRIEND.

LORRAINE was awake early the next morning. How was she to sleep when Tedo was sitting half erect in his cot staring at her reproachfully, and muttering to himself in discontented murmurs; but he smiled sweetly when she opened her eyes.

He was so excited that Lorraine could hardly dress him, and the moment he could escape from his mother's hands he trotted into his playroom to the beloved horse, while the doves stared at him with their round yellow eyes, and bowed and cooed to each other in their dove-dialect; until Waif jumped up on the window-seat, and then with a rustle and a flutter of their soft grey wings they fled to the granary roof, where the pigeons were already sitting in rows.

Lorraine sat down by her open window in a perfect ecstasy at the sweet feast Nature had spread for her delectation. Underneath her the white balls of the guelder roses looked like flakes of snow in the early morning sunlight, the laburnum fluttered long golden fingers, and the lilac perfumed the air. Pink and white may trees added their fragrance, and just at the end of the garden a fine horse-chestnut with pink blossoms stood alone like a stately sentinel. In the garden borders below her window she could see the gleaming white narcissi against a background of dark, richly coloured wall-flowers, while the star-shaped beds of purple and yellow pansies on the lawn brought back the recollection that in her childhood the pansy had been her favourite flower, and that she had once told her father so. How well she recalled his answer—

"Of course, Laurie; they are your nearest of kin—you are a heartsease yourself," and after that he often called her "his little human heartsease."

In the dewy meadows the cows were feeding, and over everything lay that indescribable freshness and sweetness of a perfect spring morning that is just melting into summer, when nature is at her zenith. Lorraine could have sat there contentedly for hours, but the prayer-bell roused her at last, and as she carried Tedo down, the maids were already filing into the dining-room. Ellison merely nodded to her cousin with a friendly smile, and Lorraine seated herself silently.

The maids were just opposite to her, and as Ellison read the allotted portion Lorraine's eyes wandered now and then to the striking face of the tall parlourmaid.

The girl was singularly handsome after a most uncommon type—the pure Greek contour recalled the head of Clytie; the brown hair lay in natural waves upon the forehead, and the eyes, of a warm hazel, were certainly beautiful. Dorcas's pretty rustic face looked quite ordinary besides Ruth's. The girl was too handsome certainly for her sphere in life.

When the servants had left the room, Ellison turned to her cousin: "Well, Lorraine, have you and Tedo slept well? You have a rested look."

"Oh, yes, thank you," replied Lorraine brightly; "but I have been up for hours! Tedo is an early riser. Dorcas brought me some delicious tea and bread-and-butter and some milk for baby, and I have been sitting at my window very happily, it was so peaceful and beautiful; for a time the birds seem to have it all to themselves, then the farmyard seemed to wake up. I could not help thinking what a contrast it was to Beaumont Street."

"I want you to forget Beaumont Street for a little," returned Ellison kindly. "You have seen too much already of the sad side of life. We must show you a brighter side when we have finished breakfast. You must see the kitchen and dairy, and my still-room. You have no idea of the spacious territory that lies behind the red-baized door. We had out-grown the dairy, so father built a new one, and turned the old one into an apple-room. Please do not feed Bairn, Lorraine; it gets him into bad habits, and I always feed him myself. By-the-bye, should you like a dog of your own? Gavin has some retriever puppies to dispose of; two of them are very handsome little fellows, and you could have your choice."

"I never had a dog of my own in my life," returned Lorraine—and her eyes sparkled with delight—"and I do so love them. Tedo would be charmed with a puppy; but are you sure that it would not be a trouble to you?"

"Not in the least—and Daniel can look after it. It must sleep in the stable—and live there too until it is older—and has left off making meals of the legs of chairs; but you can always have it out with you. By-the-bye, there is a kid in the stables that will delight Tedo."

"Tedo has been playing with his horse ever since I dressed him," replied Lorraine; and so they chatted on happily until they had finished breakfast, and then Ellison took up her big basket and led the way to the back offices of Brae Farm.

Ellison felt a pardonable pride in her kitchen; it was an immense room with two large windows looking out on the kitchen-garden and rows of bee-hives. There were oak presses against the walls, the oven looked large enough to bake bread for the village, one could see one's own face reflected in the gleaming brass and pewter; the huge fire-

place, the freshly scoured tables and big elbow-chairs, and the window-seat with its serge-covered cushions, gave it an air of comfort.

Lorraine was shown the small inner room where Ruth and Dorcas sat at their needlework with a pleasant view of the orchard, and the still-room with its oak cupboards and quaintly carved presses, and bundles of sweetly smelling herbs dangling from the ceiling.

When Ellison unlocked the press and showed her store of linen, scented with lavender, and her grocery cupboard and jam cupboards, and her stock of drugs, Lorraine's eyes opened widely and she looked at her cousin with mute reverence.

"You are a happier woman than I thought, Ellison," replied Lorraine with gentle gravity. But Ellison only smiled, and opened a deep drawer where she kept a stock of ready-made clothing.

"When Ruth and Dorcas have nothing else to do they work for the poor of South London. I generally send off a parcel once or twice a year. We do not often work for the village, as there is little real poverty amongst us. Now I must show you the scullery and wash-house just across the yard; you can see the new buildings—I call them new, though they are fifteen years old. This is the laundry; we wash everything at home, and Tabby Bates from the village helps us three days a week; she does most of the ironing. Now we will go into the dairy—mind that step, Lorraine. Ah, Eunice, I see you are hard at work making up the butter."

Lorraine looked round her in silent admiration. This was indeed an ideal dairy, the snow-white shelves with the great pans of rich yellow cream, the windows looking full upon the green orchard. Eunice, a fresh comely-looking young woman, in her pink print dress and white bib apron, was kneading the firm yellow butter into smooth tempting rolls. She glanced at Lorraine as they entered, for all the servants were a little curious about the new inmate; but she did not pause in her work; she was a reliable and invaluable servant, and Lorraine often called her and Sarah Tucker her right and left hands. Tedo was growing weary and ready for his midday nap, so he was deposited on the couch in the sitting-room, and then, while Ellison gave her orders, Lorraine wandered about the garden and orchard, and then made an exhaustive survey of the farm building, talking to everyone she encountered, and petting all the animals, until Ellison was ready to show her the poultry yard. The morning passed rapidly, and both of them were genuinely surprised when the gong summoned them in for luncheon.

"What shall you do with yourself this afternoon," asked Ellison, as they sat at the table together. "I meant to have taken you and Tedo for a drive, but Sam Brattles wants me to meet him in the big meadow; he is full of the new fencing, and after that I have promised to sit with old Mrs. Fowler, as her daughter is away. I am a very busy person, as you will soon find out for yourself; evening is generally my only leisure time."

"I mean to be busy too," returned Lorraine quickly. "Please do not waste a thought on me, Ellison. Tedo and I are always happy together. I shall take him out, I think; I want to cross that long meadow; there seems a wood beyond."

"Of course, the Brae woods! We drove through them yesterday; it is a pleasant walk, but too far for Tedo. I wish Jack, the kid, I mean, were old enough to draw a little carriage. I think I shall get a donkey for him. I have often thought a strong young donkey would be extremely useful."

"You must do nothing of the kind, Ellison," returned Lorraine, quite shocked at the notion of such extravagance. "I am used to carrying Tedo, and he really walks very nicely now; he will be as happy as a king picking daisies and buttercups; he has never seen any, and I shall be happier than any queen watching him. Come, my king of all the world," lifting her boy as she spoke, "we are going to pick up gold and silver on Nature's Tom Tiddler's ground."

"She is very graceful," thought Ellison, as she watched her cousin from the window; "she holds her head well and walks so lightly. She is interesting, too, and I think people will take to her. I know what Gavin will say: that she is such a gentlewoman, and he will like her natural frank manner. She is much happier this morning, only every now and then I see the shadow of Beaumont Street in her eyes. Well, she has one blessing—her child. Lots are more equal than people allow, but I would not exchange with her. I have never wanted to exchange with anyone."

Lorraine found that it was no easy matter to cross that long park-like meadow that lay between them and the Brae woods that she was longing to reach. How lovely and peaceful they looked in the afternoon light. There was no one in sight; she and Tedo and the birds had it to themselves. They sat down under the cedars to rest themselves, then followed slowly the windings of the woodland walk. They had reached the gate and the lodge before Lorraine bethought herself that they had come some distance, and that baby boy would be tired.

The sound of a horse's hoof broke on her ear at this moment. A gentleman was riding towards them from the village; he was unattended by any groom, and as he reached the gate he looked at the closed door of the lodge, and seemed about to dismount; but Lorraine, who had her boy firmly by the hand, sprang forward, and, unlatching the gate, held it open for the rider.

The gentleman raised his hat and thanked her courteously; then he looked at her and the boy keenly as he walked his horse through the gateway.

Lorraine had no idea that this was the owner of Brae woods, though Colonel Trevor guessed in a moment that the young widow was Ellison's cousin. Lorraine, who was still in a sort of dream, only

noticed that the man had a brown, thin face, and that he was rather distinguished-looking.

People always said this of the Colonel, in spite of his leanness and brown skin; he had a fine soldierly presence, and looked especially well on horseback; but Lorraine would not have looked at him a second time, only Tedo just then broke suddenly from her grasp.

"Me wants to vide too, mammie!" he exclaimed, kicking violently as she caught hold of him. "Boy wants to vide."

"Put him up on my saddle, and I will hold him quite safely," returned the stranger, much to Lorraine's surprise. "He looks tired, and it is a good step to the Brae Farm."

"Oh, no, I could not think of troubling you; my boy is not heavy, I can easily carry him!" Lorraine was a trifle confused by this friendly overture from a perfect stranger; with all her frankness and lack of conventionality she could be dignified with the other sex.

Colonel Trevor smiled pleasantly. "I think you had better let me have him, Mrs. Herbert." And as Lorraine looked still more surprised at hearing her own name, he continued with an amused twinkle of his eyes: "I see you have not identified me yet; my name is Trevor—Colonel Trevor. I live at Brae House. I knew that my Cousin Ellison was expecting a visitor from London, and so I imagined at once that you were the person in question."

"How strange; and I never guessed you were Colonel Trevor," returned Lorraine, in a surprised tone. "I was very dense and stupid. Are you sure that my boy will not trouble you?" and as he shook his head with another smile, she lifted Tedo up, to the boy's irrepressible delight. Lorraine's cheeks flushed, the deep, still light of mother's love came into her brown eyes as she looked up to him.

"It is too soon to ask you how you like the place," observed Colonel Trevor, "but I think you will find Brae Farm a very comfortable home. My cousin Ellison is an excellent manager; her household machinery never seems out of gear."

"To me it is a perfect paradise," returned Lorraine impulsively. And then she added naively: "As I was walking in this beautiful wood just now I was half afraid that it was a dream and that I should wake up and find myself in Camden Town again."

Colonel Trevor gave her a quick, pitying look. He was a trained observer of men, and his penetration was rarely at fault. He had already formed a favourable opinion of the new inmate of Brae Farm: he liked her frank, unsophisticated manner. Mrs. Herbert was certainly an interesting young woman, though she had no special claims to good looks, but there was an air of refinement about her that he was not slow to notice, as she walked by his side with her light springy tread, looking up at him and her boy.

"It was too strong a contrast," he observed quietly. "I have only once been in Camden Town, but I have no wish to know more of it:

it appeared to me to be delivered into the hands of gutter-merchants and itinerant stall-holders. It was Saturday night, I remember, and the gas was blazing, and the butchers were shouting out 'Come, buy, buy, buy,' and every other woman was carrying a baby and dragging another besides. It was terribly realistic, not to say squalid."

"And I lived there for nearly five months," she returned quietly. "Ah, I know those Saturday nights so well: those poor, tired mothers setting out to buy their Sunday dinners; how my heart used to ache for them, and still more for the poor babies kept out of their beds until nearly midnight. It seems hard, does it not, Colonel Trevor, that some lives should be so very full of trial and care?"

"It is one of the difficult problems of life," he replied quickly; "but I doubt if you or I will ever solve it. I do not wish you to think me a pessimist at this early stage of our acquaintance; but I have long given up trying to answer these vexed questions. We must do what we can for other people, 'help lame dogs over stiles,' according to Charles Kingsley's excellent advice, and remedy all preventible evils; but even altruism can do no more."

"Perhaps not," sighed Lorraine, and then quickly: "We are taking you out of your way, Colonel Trevor; those gates we have passed lead to Brae House."

"To be sure they do! But I am going to Brae Farm. Do you notice Miss Alice, my mare I mean, is going past the gates of her own accord, that is because my cousin gives her sugar. She is always eager to take that turning to the farm."

"You are only going on Tedo's account," returned Lorraine smiling; but though Colonel Trevor would not disclaim this fact, he could truthfully assure her that he and his mare were equally well pleased when an errand led them to Brae Farm.

(To be continued.)



THE SHEPHERDS' MIDNIGHT MASS.

A SKETCH OF CHRISTMAS EVE IN ALASSIO.

BY JESSIE LEETE.

THE most uncompromising of present-day Protestants would find it difficult to deny the poetic fitness of the annual service with which, in the pastoral districts of North Italy, the Roman Church ushers in the festival of the Nativity—"The Shepherds' Midnight Mass."

To whom could the glad tidings of Christmas Morn be more fittingly first addressed than to the *pastori*, lineal descendants, in all the essentials of humanity, of those Eastern shepherds who watched their flocks by night on the earliest Christmas Eve? To them the eternal hymn of peace and goodwill was chanted by an angelic choir, and lingering echoes of that strain seem to reach us still in the special service which from time immemorial in certain towns of the Ligurian coast has been held on Christmas Eve for the shepherds dwelling in the neighbouring mountains.

Let us suppose that you are wintering in Alassio, a little town on the Riviera di Ponente, about half-way between Genoa and Nice, lying at the head of a wide-mouthed bay, and encircled by an amphitheatre of olive-clad hills. From far and wide the shepherds gather together for the Christmas *fiesta*,ⁿ and for several days preceding it, you may see them in the narrow arched streets of the grey old town watching with quiet interest the daily routine of the inhabitants.

To the shepherd, the red-roofed, stone-paved little citta is the London or Paris of his existence. Here he exchanges his superfluous produce for the few necessities with which his own flock and tiny plot of cultivated ground fail to supply him. Here he meets his friends and relations. And here he gathers up some faint and distant echo of the great world's doings. Perhaps his wife may be with him, wearing her short full skirt and loose cotton jacket, her braided hair confined by the broad band of black velvet, which marks her caste of shepherdess; or perhaps he is accompanied only by his boys, round-faced, brown-skinned, little fellows, whose big dark eyes look already somewhat more thoughtful than those of your ordinary boy.

There is a certain serious and even stately bearing about the shepherd which marks him out from the other peasantry quite as distinctly as does his primitive and additional attire. His eyes are

steady and calm, his words few and deliberate; there is a touch of quiet dignity about him which tells of long lonely days on the silent mountain-side, and of solitary night-watches under the solemn star-lit heavens. It is, indeed, hard for us, amid the hurry of our up-to-date existence, to realise what life means to these men, among whom the ties of clanship and the patriarchal authority of the head of the family, remain in full force to-day. Money is scarcely ever used by them; barter and exchange supply their few needs. Their whole mode of life and thought is far more in accordance with the patriarchal ages of the world than with the close of the nineteenth century.

Often, during the summer, the Italian shepherd passes three months "on end" in absolute solitude, not a human being ever visiting the high mountain pastures whither he has led his flock, except, at wide intervals, the single fellow-creature who brings him his store of rude provisions. His only companions are the patient sheep and his faithful dog. No newspapers, no letters, no telegrams, ever come to interrupt the quiet of his peaceful days. Is it any wonder that the shepherd's face is calm, and his eyes far-seeing and thoughtful? Every sight and sound of Nature in her solitary majesty is familiar to him from childhood. He reckons the hours as they pass by the lengthening shadows around, and draws his weather-forecast from a hundred indications which, to our blunter senses, would be imperceptible. While the flock, which to us is but a detail of the landscape, is to him a collection of individual creatures with traits and characteristics almost as well known as those of his own children.

When winter draws near and the first snow drives him from the upland pastures, slowly and patiently the shepherd leads his flock down the steep *salita*—the narrow, rock-and-pebble-paved path which his forefathers made of old—to the shore of the Mediterranean, and there lets his charges feed on the thin coarse herbage which grows a little way from the water's edge. All day long he sits alone, gazing quietly at the deep blue sea, as in summer he watched the dazzling snow-clad peaks.

And now it is Christmas Eve, and from far and near the shepherds have gathered together, as their forefathers generation after generation have done, for the Shepherds' Mass in the Duomo of Sant' Ambrogio in Alassio.

The ancient church stands isolated in the middle of a large piazza; and from the beautifully proportioned *campanile* four or five fine bells are clashing and clanging in curiously bewildering fashion, and the inhabitants of the little town are turning out in a body to attend the Shepherds' Mass. High overhead a great white moon lights up the dark-blue sky; the stars are shining brightly, but there is no touch of frost in the calm southern night air. In the piazza we find a great crowd of the townsfolk assembled, and laughter and song break the

stillness of the quiet night. The church casts a strong black shadow across the old stone-paved piazza, and the grey stone of the campanile looks ghostly under the moonbeams.

We enter through the great western doors, heavy with ancient carving, and at the east end the enormous high altar is decorated with its hundreds of candles, and thousands of artificial flowers.

Although it is only about half-past ten o'clock, the big church seems nearly full already; almost every seat is occupied, and the aisles are blocked by women, each seeking an available spot to place the rush-bottomed chair she has brought with her from her home. But if we follow that tall shepherd now making his way through the press, we may perhaps in his wake be fortunate enough to reach the upper end of the church, for to-night every way gives place to the shepherd; he and his boys pass unchallenged where they will on Christmas Eve; the very steps of the high altar are free to them this evening, and you see their homespun frieze side by side with the silken robes of the priests within the sacred precincts.

As yet the high altar is but dimly lighted, and from the Lady Chapel behind it comes the sound of loud and monotonous chanting. Through an arched opening beside the altar we can just see the face of a fat old priest rising above a desk which holds a ponderous ancient psalter, and his wide-open mouth emits a sort of hoarse roar, which is only interrupted by an occasional response from some invisible attendants. One psalm succeeds another in apparently interminable succession. In fact we are told that the entire psalter is chanted throughout on Christmas Eve!

Let us follow those shepherds who are making their way towards the *Natale* or *Presepio* arranged in the chapel on the north side of the chancel.

Through an arched opening in the wall we look into a sort of cavern, artistically arranged to represent a mountain landscape. On the right we see a little group of figures—the Holy Family, arranged under a little straw-thatched shed according to the traditions of Italian sacred art. The manger, the cattle, the donkey, all are there; it reminds you of a *Nativity* by Botticelli. Over the broken ground in the near distance comes an irregular procession of peasants, each bringing some offering for the Holy Babe. One man dressed in a brown jacket, crimson breeches, yellow gaiters and scarlet cap, is bringing a tribute of lemons on the bough; a woman clad in a short blue skirt, scarlet apron, and yellow bodice, has a basket of tomatoes to present, a shepherd brings a lamb across his shoulders, a little girl a flat basket of grapes, an old woman has a live fowl struggling in her arms, and one poor boy who brings up the rear of the procession has nothing to offer but a large mushroom which he has just found in the mountain pasture.

The whole scene is softly lighted from above by invisible lamps. The tall shepherds stand gazing at this representation of the scene

they have met to commemorate, with a curious blending of amusement and reverence in their grave, sunburnt faces, and they linger lovingly before it, pointing out the various personages to their boys, till they are reluctantly obliged to pass on and make way for fresh admirers.

All this time the church, which seemed full an hour ago, has been growing fuller and fuller still, till now it is one densely packed mass of men, women and children, of all sorts and conditions. Midnight is fast approaching, and when an acolyte appears with his long taper an expectant stir runs through the crowd. Very soon the high altar and the great chandeliers hanging from the chancel roof blaze with the light of a hundred huge candles, the face of the fat old priest vanishes from its dim recess, and the hoarse sound of the chanting gives place to the solemn tones of the fine organ which we dimly discern in the gloom of the western gallery.

A few minutes' eager hush, and the three officiating dignitaries enter in all the glory of the richest sacred vestments the sacristy can furnish. They are followed by a long file of acolytes and choristers wearing crimson cassocks and short white surplices edged with fine old lace.

As soon as the officiants have taken their stations before the altar, an acolyte advances with his arms full of long slender candles, which he proceeds to distribute among the little shepherd boys who are sitting in long rows on the chancel steps. Then the tiniest of the choristers comes forward bearing a candle lighted from the sacred flame above the altar, and all the little fellows crowd eagerly around him to light their tapers from his, their olive cheeks glowing with excitement, and their big black eyes shining with pride and pleasure.

Meanwhile, down the centre aisle a lane is being hurriedly cleared, and the crowd divides to right and left in preparation for the coming procession.

Soon we see a stalwart acolyte advancing with an enormous crucifix, followed by many couples of scarlet-and-white-robed choristers. Then the twelve oldest shepherds present come forward and unfurl a great canopy of crimson silk attached to twelve carved and gilded poles. This they raise aloft, and then all stand waiting in the aisle while the rector, with much complicated ceremonial, takes from off the high altar a little waxen figure representing the Christ-child, lying in swaddling clothes. Bearing the image high aloft on a splendid cushion, the rector takes his place under the canopy, while the other officiants walk on either hand, holding up the corners of his vestment. Behind him comes a long train of shepherd boys, each carrying a lighted taper, then the older shepherds two-and-two, the acolytes and servers bringing up the rear.

In this order the long procession passes slowly down the church, and returns along the north aisle to the chapel in which the *Presepio* is situated, while the organ peals forth its stateliest strains and the air grows heavy with the incense of the swinging censers. Arrived at the *Presepio*, the image is reverently deposited amid the appropriate

surroundings prepared for it, and immediately there rises from a thousand voices the ancient Latin Pastoral or Christmas anthem—"Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given."

When the hymn is ended, we see the tall figure of the rector standing on the steps of the chapel. He has an impressive presence, and a great hush falls upon the crowd as his clear, resonant voice penetrates to the furthest corners of the church. As now and again he turns towards the *Natale* to illustrate some point in his brief discourse, the light from within it falls softly upon his singularly refined and pleasant countenance.

Around him stand the shepherds, their steadfast eyes never for a moment quitting the preacher's face, while in short, pointed sentences, and in the simplest language, he tells once more the oft-told tale of the Saviour's birth. He addresses himself directly to the shepherds; we others are only here to-night on sufferance. He speaks to them specially of the *poverty* of the Son of Man, and assures them that they themselves, amid all the loneliness and hardships of their solitary lives, are exactly as dear to the Heavenly Father as were those eastern shepherds of old for whom even angelic ministrations were not thought too high an honour. Then, in impassioned tones, he goes on to urge them to thankfulness of heart and holiness of life.

Presently the short sermon comes to an end, and the spell-bound listeners relax their rigid muscles. The procession is re-formed, and the image carried on the cushion back to the altar steps. Then the rector moves slowly along the line of kneeling children, with his attendant priests, and a chorister follows carrying a large brass disc to receive the minute copper coins offered by the faithful. The faces of the boys are all alight with eagerness and pleasure as their turn draws near. Nearly all the children present kneel in turn at the altar rails; and after them, a few of the older shepherds and a number of the women come forward to salute the image.

While the good rector, a little friendly smile on his kind old face, moves again and again along the chancel steps, the organ gives forth a succession of blithe quaint strains—imitations of the "pifferari" music—intended to represent the jubilant songs of the shepherds as they returned to their flocks on the earliest Christmas Eve. But when the image has been solemnly replaced below the sanctuary, the gay pastoral airs give place to more solemn music, for now the mass proper is about to begin. But before it can begin, yet another ceremony, of immemorial antiquity, has to be observed.

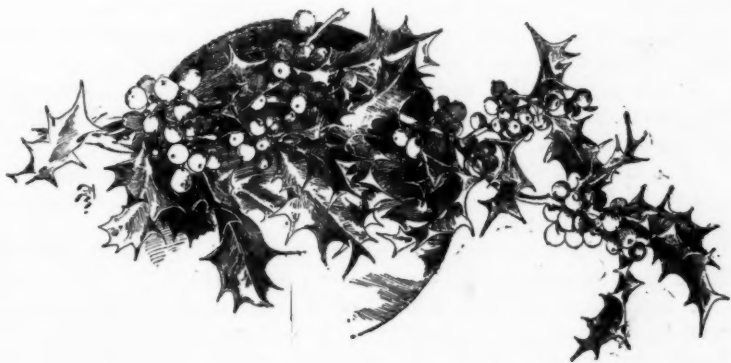
Once more a lane is formed from the great west door to the altar steps, and along this lane we, from our favoured post of observation, can see advancing with slow and majestic tread a tall and venerable shepherd, the patriarch of his tribe, who bears in his arms a snow-white lamb. The rector meets him at the chancel steps, receives the lamb in his arms, sprinkles it with a few drops of holy water, signs it with the sign of the Cross, and returns it to the waiting shepherd, who

bows in reverent silence, and immediately quits the church with the same stately dignity with which he entered it. The whole passes in almost breathless silence, and the most eager attention is paid, for every shepherd present knows—or thinks he knows—that the safety and prosperity of his property throughout the coming year depend upon the due performance of this brief ceremony; the lamb is offered as the representative of the flocks of all present, and in blessing it, the blessing of heaven is invoked upon the whole of those flocks.

When the west door has closed upon the "Father of the Shepherds" and his innocent companion, the organ gives the signal for the mass to begin, and the officiants take their appointed places before the high altar. The hour is already late, and only a greatly shortened mass is sung; it seems but a few minutes before the whole congregation bursts forth into the triumphant strains of the "Gloria in Excelsis Deo"—every voice joining in the long-familiar hymn of praise.

And now, at last, the "Shepherds' Mass" is over, and slowly the vast throng passes out into the calm and quiet night. It is past two o'clock; the moon, in all her fullest splendour is pouring down a flood of radiance which seems even more brilliant than the light of day itself; the stars have travelled westward, and the night air is delicious after the incense-laden atmosphere of the crowded church. We stand a moment in the piazza to watch the throng slowly melting away—group after group of *contadini* starting homewards up the steep hill-side paths singing Christmas hymns as they go.

The shepherds linger to the last as though loth to say farewell to this their own peculiar "*festa*." May they carry with them pleasant memories to cheer them through the long winter nights and the lonely summer days, and may next Christmas find them again assembled for the "Shepherds' Mass."



MY LORD.

I.

"THAT is my lord's portrait," said old Mrs. Clary.

My eyes followed the direction of her wrinkled fore-finger, expecting I know not what magnificent appearance, so deeply was I impressed by her reverential tone.

I was disappointed at merely seeing a half-length picture of a middle-aged country gentleman. It depicted a handsome face, but yet it was no handsomer than my own father's, and it did not wear his kind expression.

I glanced round the room in search of something more attractive. There were portraits of many by-gone lords of Marnell; for the most part grim-looking persons, staring out of age-darkened canvases, in a manner calculated to alarm my youthful imagination.

It was with a feeling of relief that I caught sight of something which appealed at once to my sympathy.

"Who are those?" I exclaimed, pointing to two companion pictures.

One was of a boy, who looked about my own age; the other was a girl, some few years younger.

"That's Mr. Rashleigh and Miss Marjory," replied Mrs. Clary, with a sigh.

"Are they dead, Mrs. Clary?" I inquired timidly.

"Not that I know of, my dear."

I wondered why she sighed then; and I trotted after the old woman, as she crossed the great hall, and down the long, echoing passages, till we reached the cheerful little room she called her own, the only cheerful spot, I used to think, in Marnell Hall.

I was very fond of the place, in spite of the gloom; and never happier than when I could go over and spend a day with Mrs. Clary at Acton Marnell.

Mrs. Clary's only daughter was married to a farmer in the next parish of Acton de la Haye; and my father and I had lodgings in her farmhouse that summer.

It was the first summer after my mother died. I had fretted after her a great deal, and was not naturally a strong child.

I must have got into a low, nervous state of health; I can even now recall the languid feeling that had oppressed me in our London house that winter, and the weary weight which dragged down my little feet as I toiled up the many stairs to my lonely nursery.

I think it was on my account that father took those lodgings at

Acton, where the healing spring-time soon made me as bright and gay as all the other young things around me.

My poor father even cheered up a little, and would laugh over my discoveries and adventures; but he was a good deal occupied with his books and his writing, and I was often left to my own devices.

Mrs. Pertwee, our landlady, was very good-natured, but her mind was taken up by the young broods of chickens, ducklings and goslings, which engrossed her at this time of the year; and when old Mrs. Clary came to stay at the farm, she and I entered on a close comradeship, arising in part from our position as the two unoccupied members of the household.

By the time her visit ended, the old lady and I had grown such friends, that she invited me to come and see her at Acton Marnell.

The old hall was only a couple of miles from Acton de la Haye, a distance that was nothing to the sturdy pair of legs which my father now eyed with so much satisfaction; and many an afternoon did I walk over to the hall and have tea with the old housekeeper in her bright little room.

Lord Marnell never came to the place himself. He was an old man now, and occupied a larger house in another county—a Georgian atrocity, with a huge Grecian portico, and fat pillars reaching up to the top of the building.

I saw the place years afterwards, and wondered how he could have deserted the beautiful old hall at Acton Marnell.

"But he never liked it after Mr. Rashleigh's mishap," explained Mrs. Clary.

"What was Mr. Rashleigh's mishap?"

"Oh, well, Master Hugh; we won't talk about that. Let bygones be bygones, as Miss Marjory says."

"Is that the little girl in the picture?" I inquired.

"Yes. But she isn't a little girl now."

"Is she Mr. Rashleigh's sister?"

"She's no relation to him at all that I know of; Miss Marjory is one of the De la Hayes, and she and her cousin, Mr. Eustace, were both wards of my lord."

"She is a pretty little girl," I remarked, approvingly, "but I don't like him—the boy, I mean; he looks cross."

"Only the family temper, my dear," replied Mrs. Clary, as complacently as if she had been alluding to the colour of their hair, or the shape of their features. "All the Marnells were hot-tempered and so was Mr. Eustace too. I suppose he caught it from the others. There was only Miss Marjory, as sweet a young lady as ever stepped, to keep the peace among them."

The old woman rambled on with the stories of the family she had served nearly all her life; she had been Mr. Rashleigh's foster-mother, she told me, and I sat and listened to her.

She had passed not exactly into second childhood, but into a state

where bygone events seemed nearer to her than the incidents of yesterday.

Sometimes I could not follow her meaning at all, my childish inexperience giving me no clue to her stories.

My mind received a confused picture of strife and unhappiness, of fierce quarrels in those gloomy rooms, of shameful accusations met with sullen pride and lasting resentment, of some final catastrophe I could not understand, but after which those dark figures seemed to melt away, leaving Marnell Hall to the desolation in which I found it.

I used to wander through the deserted gardens, between the dark yew hedges, trying to piece together Mrs. Clary's scattered memories into a connected whole. But somehow I could never grasp the meaning of the silent, gloomy forms which peered at me, I fancied, through the dark recesses of those sombre alleys.

The one ray of hope and happiness rested on the sweet figure of Marjory, as she glanced from time to time across the dreary tales, just as the butterfly before me flitted across the dark yew hedge.

My hat was off my head in a moment, and I was chasing the butterfly along the garden paths, till it led me into the sunny meadows beyond; and that was like Marjory too, for Mrs. Clary told me she had gone to live in some warm far-off country, away from the shadows of Marnell Hall.

"All gone, my dear," said the old woman in her quavering tones. "My lord is gone, and Mr. Eustace too; gone beyond the grave, he is, and we mustn't speak ill of the dead. Mr. Rashleigh went to foreign parts as well, and they do say he died there; at least, he's never come back again; and Miss Marjory is waiting for him still. This world or the next, whenever he comes back to her, he'll find her waiting."

Her voice died away as she murmured the last words, and she fell into one of the dozes in which she spent a large part of the hot summer afternoons.

I returned to my old occupation of looking at the pictures and rambling about the grounds, always with those shadowy figures for my companions.

I suppose the trouble I had been through, the great shock of grief so disproportioned to my tender years, had left me in an unusually impressionable state; for I don't think I was naturally a dreamy child, and after leaving Acton de la Haye the story of the Marnells passed from my mind.

We never returned to the place; Mrs. Clary died the following year, and Mrs. Pertwee and her husband moved into another neighbourhood.

My father sent me to school, where I had plenty of young companions, and football and declensions engaged my attention.

Before long my father married again; my step-mother, who was a

kindly and sensible woman, made my home a happy one, and life in general went very well with me till I had completed my twentieth year.

Then a sudden reverse of fortune altered all my plans. I was at Cambridge at the time, intending to take a medical degree, as my father had always destined me for the university, and my own tastes led me to be a doctor.

The failure of a company, in which my father was largely interested, reduced him from easy circumstances to a condition of poverty. Only enough was saved to support him and his wife in a very humble manner, and I felt I ought immediately to set about earning something for myself.

My step-mother was as much concerned as my father at the change in my prospects, and it was mainly through her exertions that an opening was found for me as pupil and assistant to her brother, Dr. Rodney, who had a large, though scattered practice at Wallanooga, a rising town in New South Wales.

II.

I REACHED Sidney rather out of health, the sea voyage had not agreed with me, and I had had a good deal of worry and anxiety before leaving home.

A letter from Dr. Rodney awaited me at Sidney with directions for my further journey.

Wallanooga was some seventy miles beyond the nearest railway station, and I must travel the rest of the way on horseback.

Dr. Rodney directed me to hire a horse at Matherson, where the railway line ended, and go to a place called Four-roads Farm, mid-way between Wallanooga and the station.

The doctor was in the habit of going to the Four-roads once a week, on Thursdays, and I was to time my arrival so as to meet him there, and he would show me the remaining part of the road.

Australian tracks are often puzzling to a stranger, especially after the heavy rains, which had lately fallen, when I reached Matherson; so I thought myself fortunate at finding a man who was setting out for Four-roads Farm, and offered me a seat in the light cart he was driving.

"You'll find it less tiring than horseback," he said, "and you don't look strong."

When I learnt that I could be sure of getting a horse, or a trap, to take me on from Four-roads Farm, I gladly accepted the offer.

In the course of our drive I learnt that my companion was a sort of wandering showman. He was a bright, alert young fellow, not many years older than myself, and he told me he was hoping to give a conjuring entertainment that evening at Four-roads Farm.

I wondered how he could hope for an audience at what I had understood would be a lonely spot.

He explained that Four-roads Farm was more of an inn than a farm, and was a central meeting-place for the scattered inhabitants of a wide district. Besides, the quarterly pay-day, when many of the stockmen received their wages, was only just passed.

We should probably fall in with some of them going to spend their money either in Sidney or Matherson, or even at the Four-roads Farm itself.

"They are free with their money," said my companion, "and many of them are very good subjects, too."

I did not understand the last part of his remark, and he explained that his conjuring entertainments were generally concluded by a display of mesmerism.

I was interested in the subject, though disposed to think public exhibitions of mesmerism were generally produced by fraud and collusion.

"Sometimes they are," replied my companion, "and, of course, they are often eked out by various expedients; but if you know your business, you don't need any confederates. The lonely lives many of these stockmen lead make them very easily subject to mesmeric influence. People with untrained, ill-developed brains, or those who, through illness or some other cause, have less than the usual mental vigour are the best subjects to experiment upon."

"It can't be a healthful practice," I remarked, "and I think it ought to be prohibited, at any rate for exhibition purposes."

"That's what your friend Dr. Rodney says," replied my companion, laughing. "I must make haste and secure my harvest in Wallanooga district, I see, before you have time to spread your views."

"What reason have you to think Dr. Rodney is my friend?" I asked, a little startled; for I had not mentioned any of my own affairs—at least, I thought I hadn't—and my companion was, like myself, a stranger to the district.

"I always find out all I can about a place before going there. One picks up odds and ends of information wherever one goes. Only last night I met a Wallanooga man at the hotel at Matherson. He was going up to Sidney, and we had a talk together."

"Got a good doctor up at Wallanooga?" I asked, after he had told me half the gossip of the place.

"Very good," he said, "and a rattling good practice, too; the only doctor for forty miles round. He has more work than he can tackle, and I hear he's getting out a young fellow from England to help him—some college swell I'm told. The doctor comes out to Four-roads Farm every Thursday to see the old man there, who's been ailing this long while. Don't let him catch you at your mesmerism to-morrow! He does not hold with it at all—thinks it ought to be put down."

"I suspected who you were as soon as I saw you, chiefly on account of your anxiety to reach Four-roads Farm by Thursday; and you've said half-a-dozen things since then to confirm me in my opinion,"

"You are very open about your methods," I remarked.

"I'm not afraid of telling you," he replied, carelessly. "You won't betray me, and you can do me a good turn with Dr. Rodney in case he tries to get up a party against me. One good turn deserves another, and I don't think you'd have reached Four-roads Farm to-night if you hadn't fallen in with me."

My companion only spoke the truth. Not only was the track often faint and difficult to find, but I was feeling ill and exhausted with the heat of the day.

My companion made me lie down in the cart, and rigged up a screen from the sun out of some of his "properties," so that I reached Four-roads Farm with less fatigue than I could have done in any other manner.

I found I was an expected guest; at least, Dr. Rodney had warned the landlady I should turn up there some Thursday, and inquire for him.

He had not yet arrived at the inn, so I declined the private room, which was always reserved for the doctor, and shared my meal with the friend who had shared his cart with me.

Food and rest in the shelter of the great, cool guest-room at Four-roads Farm made me feel well enough to enjoy looking about me, and noticing the strange new scene upon which I had entered.

There were men and women from outlying settlements come in to consult the doctor about various ailments; one or two of them had brought their children with them for the same purpose; others only described the maladies of sufferers left at home, and one man, who had brought a light trap and a fine young Australian horse in it, was hoping to drive the doctor thirty miles into the bush to see his sick wife.

I was beginning to understand a little of the life that lay before me, and was not ill-pleased with the prospect.

Meanwhile, my eye had wandered on to a different group.

Three or four stockmen, evidently answering to the description my friend had lately given me, were sitting at one of the tables drinking, and occasionally talking.

One of the party, a fine-looking man of about forty, was reading a Sidney newspaper, which had just been brought in.

As I was looking at him, he suddenly flung down the paper, with a violent exclamation; his tanned, ruddy face grew ghastly pale.

"What's up, Joe?" asked a companion. He made no reply, but, rising from his chair, staggered out of the room.

One of the other men picked up the paper, and glanced at the page which Joe had been reading. "I can't make out anything!" he said at last, handing on the paper to his neighbour.

He looked at it with no better success, and then the little party broke up, and most of them left the room.

My companion the showman next took possession of the sheet.

"Do you understand what is the matter?" I asked, seeing the

careful manner in which he went through every item of news, almost as if he wanted to learn them by heart.

"Not in the least," he replied. "But you never can tell where you mayn't find a clue to something useful. I must be off now, though, to arrange about my evening's entertainment. You will patronise it, will you not?"

I could not refuse my kind helper; though when seven o'clock came, I felt more ready for bed than for his show.

He had secured the large guest-room for his performance, and the deal tables, placed side by side at one end, made a rough platform, on which my friend took his stand. There may have been some thirty persons in the room, and I was surprised at the quality of the entertainment provided for this haphazard audience. Not only were the usual tricks performed with great dexterity, but there were two or three original ones, which I afterwards discovered were the invention of the showman.

The mesmerism also interested me. The man was an accomplished mesmerist; he had an unerring skill in picking out likely subjects for his experiments; and I was pleased to observe, that though he led his patients to go through various striking and laughable performances, he refrained from inciting them to anything painful, or likely to be injurious.

The audience shared my interest and admiration; the little party I had noticed earlier in the day were present; and the newspaper-reader, who had recovered his composure and his complexion, was among his former companions. My attention was specially attracted to him by the other men, who seemed urging him to come forward on to the platform.

"Not I," he replied. "I'd rather put questions than answer them."

There was something strangely familiar to me about his face, and the next moment I visibly started, as one of his comrades replied: "We all know you for a close one, Joe Clary!"

The mesmerist answered in what appeared to me a needlessly long and rambling manner, telling Joe Clary he should certainly ask his questions, but that he would like to interrogate a fresh medium, as the other ones were now tired. As he finished his speech, he was addressing himself to me rather than to Joe Clary. I was getting very tired and sleepy, the momentary interest, excited by hearing a once familiar name was dying away. I was already drowsy, when he held a small, bright object before the eyes, with a request that I would look at it.

It was too much trouble to refuse, even if I had wanted to do so; but I felt no such desire. The large, barn-like room, and strange faces around me dissolved into a vast gloomy hall; and faces no longer those of living men and women were looking at me out of the darkened canvases upon the wall.

Then I was chasing a butterfly, which escaped in the sunlight. I

still pursued something, but I did not know what it was. My efforts grew feebler, as the object of my search became more distant and mysterious, till consciousness and effort ceased together, and I suppose I sank into a dreamless sleep.

III.

"I WILL not allow it—it has gone much too far already!"

These words, uttered in a decided and indignant tone of voice, fell upon my ears as I slowly came to myself again.

I felt very weak; too exhausted to lift my head, which lay against the back of the chair; but I opened my eyes and gazed from beneath my half-closed eyelids at the faces around me. The audience had evidently been moved by some strong excitement, but apparently the crisis was now over, for I noticed nothing unusual, except the appearance of the spectators themselves, and the buzz of eager comment with which they seemed to be discussing some recent occurrence. I wondered how I could have slept through such an event, and vaguely speculated what it was all about. I shifted my head a little, to get a view of the figures on the platform.

"He's moving! he's awake!" exclaimed an eager voice, which I recognised as belonging to the man they called Joe Clary.

"Let him alone! I tell you I won't have him questioned," replied the first speaker, whom I now saw to be a man about fifty years of age, with the dress and bearing of a gentleman. He had not been among the audience at the beginning of the entertainment, and I supposed he must have entered during my sleep.

Joe Clary turned fiercely upon him, and his right hand slipped into a side pocket. In another instant his weapon would have been out, but already the mesmerist was at his side, staying his hand with a friendly pressure on his arm.

"You'll let him ask one question," he said, addressing himself to the stranger. "It's life and death with him, doctor, and it won't injure our young friend here. I've taken good care of him to-day, as he'll tell you if you ask him. The fact is, he was sick before ever he got to Matherson. Now then, Joe Clary!" he added, as the doctor nodded an unwilling assent, "ask what you've got to ask, and be quick about it."

Joe Clary fixed his keen eyes upon me—there was a strange, yet familiar sternness in his expression, as he asked me:

"What made you call me 'my lord?'"

"I'm sure I don't know," I replied feebly. "You aren't a lord, are you? but you look like one, I think."

"Right you are, my boy!" said a voice in the audience. "We all knew Joe had once been a swell."

Joe bent his eyes upon me once more.

"Do you mean to say you don't know my name?"

"No, my lord," I replied, adding the title so unconsciously, I did not know what I had done till the audience shouted:

"He's said it again!"

"I told you it was a mere coincidence!" said the doctor.

"Coincidence!" echoed the other contemptuously: "do you suppose all the rest of his speech was a coincidence? I tell you, he has been sent out with a message to me, though why he has chosen this confounded way to deliver it——"

"And I tell you, he has been sent out from England to help me as my pupil and assistant!" replied the doctor.

"That's so, Joe Clary," said the mesmerist.

"Then what does he mean by talking to me of Miss Delahay? What do you know of Miss Delahay, and when did you see her?" asked Joe, turning again to me.

"I never heard of her in my life," I replied. "I don't know what you are talking about—I want to go to bed."

"The first sensible word I've heard this evening. Come, young man, I'll give you a hand." So saying, the doctor slipped his arm round my waist, lifted me to my feet, and led me from the room.

"Now, gentlemen, after the remarkable mesmeric performance you have witnessed, I hope you'll contribute liberally to the hat, which I shall have the honour of sending round before any others of our party leave the room."

The mesmerist's words followed us in our progress along the passage, and the clinking of coin which began before we were out of earshot testified to the success of his appeal.

Dr. Rodney accompanied me to my room, told the landlady to bring me some broth, and give an eye to me during the night. He also charged me not to get up the next morning, but to wait till he returned. He was going to visit a sick woman out in the bush; but would be back at Four-roads Farm in time to get home to Wallanooga the following afternoon, if I were well enough to travel.

In spite of his fears, I passed a good night, and felt pretty well the next morning, able to enjoy the breakfast my landlady brought up to me.

Now that I was rested and refreshed, the events of the previous evening returned to my mind, and I was beginning to seek for an explanation, when the landlady re-entered my room.

"A gentleman wants to see you, sir, but the doctor said——"

"Oh, show him in, I'm all right," and at the words the mesmerist entered the room. He inquired kindly how I felt. "I want you to soothe down that old bear of a doctor," he added. "I'm going to give an entertainment at Wallanooga, and I don't wish for a row."

"What put him out last night, and what was all the excitement about? I asked Dr. Rodney; but he told me to wait, and I was too tired to insist on an explanation."

"It was an odd business altogether. I don't quite understand it myself; but I'll tell you all I can, and if you will do the same, we may come to a right understanding of the matter."

"First of all," I replied, "why did you choose me as a medium? You knew I had only just arrived from England, and that it was highly improbable I should know anything about an old resident here, like Joe Clary."

"I merely asked you at a venture. You started at the sound of Joe Clary's name, and I remembered that the part of the newspaper he had been reading in the afternoon contained the English news. I thought you had noticed something connected with the name, so I waited till you were quite off, when I said:

"'Tell this gentleman, Mr. Joe Clary, what sort of news he has had to-day!'

"'You've had bad news, my lord,' you replied.

"The man nearly jumped out of his skin when you said 'my lord.'

"'How did he know it? I didn't know it myself till to-day!' he exclaimed. I saw you had got a scent of some sort or another, so I desired you to tell us what you knew about 'my lord.' The whole roomful of us were pretty excited by this time, I can tell you, and I felt a little like one of those old fellows who raised a spell without quite knowing how the thing worked. You answered my question in a voice quite unlike your own:

"'My lord is gone, and Mr. Eustace too—gone beyond the grave—he is, and we mustn't speak of the dead. Mr. Rashleigh went to foreign parts, and they do say he died there; at least he's never come back again. And Miss Marjory is waiting for him still. This world or the next, whenever he comes back to her, he'll find her waiting.'

"Your voice was quite weak and quavering, like a woman's voice, and it died away at the end, so that we could only just catch what you said. You appeared to sink into a deeper sleep than before, and you seemed so exhausted that I was unwilling to question you further. I may also own that I suspected you of having told us all you knew; but Clary was worked up to a frantic state of excitement, and I was not sorry when Dr. Rodney, who had just arrived at Four-roads Farm, came in and put a stop to the performance.

"I think you heard the rest for yourself, but I am certain Clary understood what you were talking about, which is more than anybody else did, unless you can throw any light upon the subject. Did you ever know any one of the name of Clary in the old country?"

"I knew an old Mrs. Clary years ago, when I was quite a little fellow and staying at Acton de la Haye."

"Delahay!" repeated my companion; "that was the name Clary asked you about so anxiously. He said you had mentioned a Miss Delahay, but he was mistaken about that. The only woman you mentioned was 'Marjory.' Did she live at Acton de la Haye?"

I shook my head. "I don't know any Marjory, except," I added, as an old memory slowly returned to me, "the one Mrs. Clary once told me about, who belonged to the De la Hayes. She must have been a pretty little girl; her portrait hung beside Rashleigh Marnell's in the great hall at Acton Marnell and 'my lord's.' Good heavens!" I exclaimed abruptly, "Joe Clary is exactly like that portrait of 'my lord!'"

My companion nodded in a satisfied and sagacious manner.

"Read this," he said; "I think it's all pretty clear now."

He placed the Sidney newspaper in my hand and pointed to a paragraph in the English intelligence.

"We regret to have to record the death of Lord Marnell, which took place suddenly last night, at his residence of Acton Marnell. We understand that his lordship leaves no issue, his only son, Mr. Rashleigh Marnell, having died in Australia some years ago."

"Now do you see who Joe Clary is?"

"Can he be Mr. Rashleigh Marnell?"

"Lord Marnell is his proper title. He must have read of his father's death in yesterday's paper, and it must have been sufficiently startling to him to hear himself addressed as 'my lord,' within a few hours of receiving the news. I'll go down now to the poor fellow and send him up to you if you'll allow me. He means to catch the evening train for Matherson, and hopes to be able to take his passage home in the *Cymria*, which leaves Sidney to-morrow."

My interview with Lord Marnell was a short one, as he had little time to spare.

I told him all I could remember of the old childish memories, which slowly pieced themselves together in my mind, and explained about my acquaintance with the old nurse and housekeeper who had told me so many stories about Marjory and her companions. These were dim and blurred in my waking moments, though I had reproduced the old woman's words with such photographic accuracy in my mesmeric sleep. But this I have since found is not unusual in cases of somnambulism, to which the mesmeric trance is closely allied.

I thought Lord Marnell seemed disappointed at my scanty information, and especially at its being of such old date. He had imagined I was a messenger from his old friend.

"I may be that still," I replied.

"I trust you are," he answered. "It is certain that, but for you I should not be returning home. I had made up my mind yesterday that I would never go back to a country where everyone believed me to be dead; but if she is waiting——"

He broke off abruptly.

"If I can ever do anything for you, Mr. ——; you haven't told me your name."

I told him, and added: "I should think it a great kindness if you

would call on my parents and tell them you met me here. They will be so glad to see someone who has just seen me."

Six months later I received a paper from England with a mark against a notice of marriage.

"At San Castillio, Italy, Rashleigh, Lord Marnell to Marjory daughter of the late Roger de la Haye."

A little paragraph, in the body of the paper, mentioned that the marriage had been very quietly celebrated, as the bridegroom was in mourning; but that it had aroused much interest in the Acton neighbourhood, where it would unite the two properties of the Marnells and the De la Hayes.

Last year I went home to see the old country and the old people once more. My parents were well, and I had had the happiness of adding to their comfort, as things had prospered with me at Wallanooga.

This time I did not travel alone, and my little Australian wife made me take her to Acton Marnell upon a pressing invitation from "My Lord." It was with her at my side that I again looked at Marjory's portrait in the hall, and visited the little housekeeper's room where I had spent so many childish hours. But she declined the visit to Acton Marnell Church; and Lady Marnell was my guide to the quiet spot where my old friend lay buried.

"Why, you must have put up the headstone to her memory before you were married!" I exclaimed, as I read the inscription of Anne Clary's name and age, which were recorded by "her grateful friend, Marjory de la Haye."

"I had it placed there the year after she died," replied the sweet-faced, grey-haired lady beside me—grey before her time. "I did not know then how much cause I had to be grateful to her; and to you, too, my friend," she added, in her own gracious manner.

We had pleasant memories to take back to our Australian home, though my wife, like the true little colonial that she is, declares nothing quite equalled the entertainment of the celebrated Australian conjurer, who was giving the most popular amusement in London at the time of our visit.

She felt truly uplifted when I took her to call upon that great man.

He was quite as distinguished as Lord Marnell, "and oh, so much more amusing!"

"Well," replied my old friend, laughing, "you see it is my business to be entertaining; but let us speak with all respect of Lord Marnell. I have had many successful evenings," he added, turning to me, "and I have addressed half the courts in Europe since I last had the pleasure of seeing you; but I have never enjoyed anything more than that exciting moment at Four-roads Farm, when, with your good help, we succeeded in discovering 'My Lord.'"



"NEATH ROBES OF ERMINE, SOFT AND LIGHT . . ."

THE MORNING OF THE YEAR.

It is the morning of the year,
And though it open chill and grey,
Hope smiles serenely down on fear,
As she leads in the white new day;
Whose robes so softly over-fold
The withered leaves, bestrewn and torn,
That wild winds toss'd o'er hill and wold—
Sad relics of a year outworn.
Fall thick and fast, ye snowflakes white,
To wrap the earth, and hide away
With loving care from human sight
All sad reminders of decay!

It is the morning of the year,
And soon the blackbird and the thrush
Will tune their voices, sweet and clear,
And vocal make each flow'ring bush.
And soon the grass will spring and grow,
And new-born lambs will bask and play,
Where yonder wreaths of frozen snow
Beneath the hedge-row shine to-day.
Fall thick and fast, ye snowflakes white,
To wrap the earth and safely fold
'Neath robes of ermine, soft and light,
Her tender nurslings from the cold!

It is the morning of the year,
And lusty in the mellow mould,
And in the bare brown trees that rear
Their boughs, a-tremble with the cold,
New life is stirring even now,
With hope on tip-toe for the time,
When gentle airs, and vernal glow,
Shall set the snow-drop bells a-chime;
Whose herald voices, low and small,
Will steal through wood and garden bowers,
Till Spring, responding to the call,
Comes to us, crowned with buds and flowers!

HELEN MARION BURNSIDE.

BLACK RUDOLPH'S MASS.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

I.

IT was Christmas Eve 1608. The blinding snow, driven by a furious wind, whirled in the faces of the shepherds, caught with their flocks on the lonely Cumberland Fells. Shap Fell is not balmy at any time; to-night it was almost death to be out upon the trackless hills. Even in the more sheltered valley the cold was very much felt, and the servants at Shapston Manor were huddled shivering round a roaring wood fire.

Their master, the Squire, was not beloved by equals or inferiors; all the world over his name was hated, for he had travelled and committed crimes in many lands; "Black Rudolph" was a fitting name for such a black-souled man. He had amassed a large fortune, how or where no one exactly knew; but there were rumours of a large vessel cruising off the not far distant coast at times. However, Rudolph Baston was getting on in years; he had, a few months ago, returned from a longer cruise than usual, bringing with him a large chest, very heavy and very strong, containing, it was supposed, plundered coin, or valuables of other kinds.

A curious incident occurred as eight stout serving-men bore the chest across the courtyard. An unknown man handed a parchment scroll to Sir Rudolph, and turning, fled quickly, and was soon lost to sight. The master of Shapston read the letter, and his scowling face became like a thundercloud. "Catch me yon scoundrel," he roared; "spit him, you lazy knaves, and take heed he escapes ye not." In spite, however, of their frantic efforts, the mysterious stranger disappeared, and was no more seen. The offending missive was placed carefully in a deed-box, not, however, before its contents had leaked out. It ran as follows:—

"The daie of reckoning is close upon thee, O black-hearted one. The Masse that thou dost write shall be for thine own sowle's healthe, and lest Purgatory shoulde prove too sweete, no reste shalt thou have for that sowle; thy spirite shall unquiet roam till one shall complete the Masse. Nor till this is done shall thy race prosper, or the foul-won golde availle it."

Rudolph shouted to a trembling lackey, "Come, fellow, bear me a light to the chapel; I go to play upon the organ."

For this strange man was a musician in the fullest sense of the

word—a master of his art. Strangely enough, the music he composed was sacred music—chants, masses, kyries. He rose from his great carved chair before the fire, and going to the great iron deed-box that stood against the wall he unlocked it, and took tenderly from the top of the pile of parchments lying within a bulky roll of manuscript music. Then from the oaken table he took an inkhorn and a quill-pen, and going to the door stalked into the great square hall and up the grand staircase, at the foot of which a shivering servant awaited him carrying a flickering lamp of bronze.

The silent pair reached the gallery, and Sir Rudolph unlocked a heavy oaken door studded with iron nails, and went along a stone passage, the man with the light following at his heels, their footsteps echoing around them in a strange ghostly way. At last another iron-clamped door was reached, the master unlocked it, and they were in the icy-cold chapel.

The man, his teeth chattering, lit a lamp by the manuals of the organ, and, taking his light with him, withdrew behind the instrument to blow.

Rudolph arranged his music before him, and began to play. I, his descendant, who have that music, and many a time have played it on that organ, know the beauty of that grim man's composition. At the time of which I am writing the mass was almost finished; it wanted but the final clause of the "Gloria."

Its author played the finished numbers through; then, placing his inkhorn and pen at hand, he began the portion of the "Gloria" he had already completed. To the amazement of the blower he passed triumphantly on to a glorious end; even the untutored clown was moved by the grand strains he heard.

After that there came a long silence. At last the man grew startled; his master must have been overcome by the cold. He came from behind the organ.

The Master of Shapston was leaning forward over the ivory keys, his head resting on the unfinished score. Piercing his back was a dagger, glittering on his velvet tunic. The master was dead; yet no sound of human footstep had been heard, and it seemed impossible that any human being had entered the chapel. The threat of the parchment had been fulfilled.

II.

I, JAMES BASTON, in the year of our Lord 1809, am writing this most strange history, which was but completed last Christmas.

The curse pronounced in that most mysterious letter to my ancestor had of a truth fallen heavily upon us, and when I, a lad of eighteen, a year ago succeeded to the title and estates upon my father's death, why, there was but the title to live upon.

Still that time-stained mass score lay at the bottom of the ancient iron box, where it had been placed by Black Rudolph's nephew, his successor, for no man of the race was a musician to complete it, and the treasure was still unfound. Its hiding-place was undisturbed, for though many had searched, yet because the searchers did all die by violence, at length no man cared to continue the quest. But I was of different mould from the rough squires who preceded me.

The old organ was my solace, and many a time and oft had I tried to finish the "Gloria," but never did it quite accord with the grand solemn strains of the mass my ancestor had been so awfully withheld from finishing.

It was Christmas Eve, 1808. Starvation looked me in the face, for I could not sell my ancestral acres. Hungry and cold, I sat there in company with the faithful servant who clung to me in my sore distress.

My eye was caught by the iron box which rested by the wall, and a longing for music came over me.

"Sandy," I said to my old Scotch retainer, "will you come to the chapel and blow the old organ for me. It may help to keep the cold out, and pass away the time."

He willingly assented, and taking up the lamp, prepared to follow me upstairs to the chapel.

I unlocked the box, and unearthed the yellow music roll.

"Eh, sir, but it's no canny," said Sandy in his broadest dialect, as he prepared to go behind the organ.

I put my pencil ready, and played through the numbers which were finished, and then I tried the first clause of that magnificent Gloria. A conviction was stealing over me that I should never give it a fitting close. It was beyond my power.

Suddenly there was a ghostly step behind me; I felt an unseen presence hovering near. A strange thrill passed through me. I was spell-bound—terrified.

Then the lamp flared up and went out, leaving the organ loft bathed in an unearthly, glimmering light. A chill fell upon me, as if a block of ice were on the organ-stool beside me, and a pair of white, long-fingered hands came down upon the keys. I crawled up and stood some yards away, staring, fascinated; where I had been sitting, there I now saw dimly the outlines of a shadowy figure. It appeared to be dressed in rich black velvet, and its face was inexpressibly sad. Then it began to play, and its playing was not of this earth. Grand had the theme seemed when I had played it, but far grander and more wonderful was it played by the master-hand, the master-brain that composed it two centuries ago. I listened to the swelling chords; the grand fugue. Then came the Gloria. The figure played it right through without hesitation, and the close, hitherto unfinished in all its wonder and magnificence, was burnt in upon my memory. The figure picked up the pencil and began to write upon the ancient score.

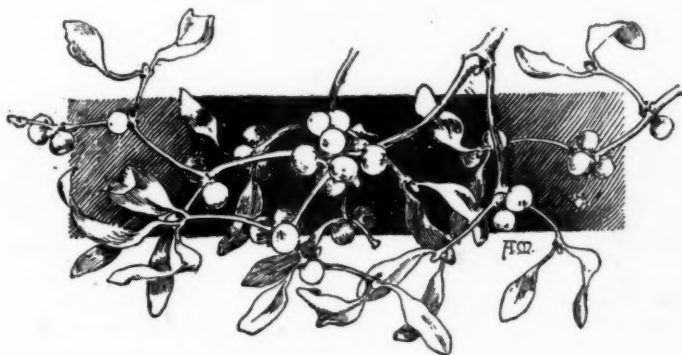
Then I saw another black, unearthly figure creep up from behind, lift its hand, and with sure aim bring down a dagger; the musician fell forward. Then all seemed to vanish and disappear. The lamp suddenly burnt up, and I was alone. I leaped upon the organ stool and played from memory. Yes, it was all right. The mass at last was finished, and Black Rudolph's soul could rest.

But what was this? The notes were written in *pencil*, but in the same characters as the first part, and at the end was inscribed in queer pointed writing:

"Seeke within the altar-rails, and beneathe the Highe Altar shalt thou fynde Ye Treasure. Use it well and charitably, and it shall do thee no hurte. Praye for mye sowle. R. B."

It was true. On Christmas morning Sandy and I took up the flags where the high altar had once stood, and underneath we found a strong chest full of gold and jewels, a priceless treasure.

Five years have passed away, I am no longer a poor man. Ere long my estate reaped the benefit of my altered fortunes. The land was enriched, cottages were improved, my tenants are happy and thriving, and devoted to their landlord. Three years ago I married the loveliest and best girl in the county, and my little son is blest with his mother's eyes, and my little daughter, they are pleased to say, is her father in miniature. The curse is worked out, and let us hope that the poor ghost has found pardon and peace. As I write these words, the bells suddenly ring out the Old Year, ring in the New. My wife is sitting near me tracing pictures in the fire. Outside the window we hear the village choir singing a carol, and the words are distinctly audible in the night silence: "Peace on earth, goodwill towards men." Then in a silent aspiration, I hope that the years as they pass may find me worthy of the multitude of blessings that have been showered upon me.



WHERE MILK AND HONEY FLOW.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "LETTERS FROM MAJORCA," "MEMORIALS OF MRS. HENRY WOOD," ETC., ETC.



THE PARIS QUAYS.

ONCE again we found ourselves at the Paris railway station, bound Spain-wards and South-wards.

The waters of the Channel had been calm and placid as the blue sky above them, and the most fanciful lady on board had vainly endeavoured to excite compassion and think herself a martyr to circumstance.

Though it was late autumn the temperature was almost that of midsummer. At Calais every one landed as airily as though

they had just gone through the experiences of a small and delightful yachting trip. As usual there were all sorts and conditions of men—and women. Again the curious, the grotesque, the impossible were in the majority: those who make you wonder why there should be so many different types of humanity—and so few of them interesting: why the vast proportion of travellers one meets one would cheerfully consign to the next compartment, so that one's sense of the beautiful and the eternal fitness of things need not be

disturbed and shocked. They streamed across Calais's new and cheerful quay in broken ranks, a disordered procession, struggling with all that amount of hand baggage that is so much in the way, so sure to break your shins and bruise your ribs, as its owners hurry forward in a useless endeavour to be first in the race. Though why they should be first more than last they could hardly tell you.

The douane was passed. One ancient lady who stood near us was politely asked by the examiner if she had cigars, tobacco, or brandy to declare. Her beautiful flaxen wig seemed almost to shift its position as she asked them if they mistook her for a New Woman : quakerlike answering one question with another. The examiner with uncompromising humour received her question *au pied de la lettre*, probably only knowing of one meaning to the term. He looked at the lady, who in spite of flaxen wig, and rouge, and pencilled brows and lashes, was unmistakably of the Past. All his intelligence was in his eyes as he replied : "About the same age as the century, I should say, madame." And then placing a chalk mark upon her various impedimenta, he bowed politely and turned to the next in waiting. Had those two found themselves alone together, judging from the outraged lady's expression there would have been tragic paragraphs in the next day's sensational papers. As it was she entered one of the trains in waiting, and we saw her no more. She had evidently been a beauty in her day, and it is hard to have to yield to time and abdicate in favour of others.

So we passed on to the gay capital of Paris, which in her day has almost been to the modern world what Rome was to the ancient. And if she is not altogether that now, who has she to thank but herself? We cannot stand still, but like the tide must be ever ebbing or flowing. Whirling through the broad thoroughfares, we felt that in some ways she still holds her own. Nowhere such floods of light, turning night into day, making one blink like owls in the sunshine. Nowhere such distracting and resplendent shops that a king's ransom and a Jew's ransom into the bargain would not purchase. Nowhere such a Vanity Fair crowded with a people whose watchword is *Insouciance*. "Let us take our fill of pleasure, nor think of the morrow." Such is their motto. Passing from the Gare du Nord to the brilliant boulevards was more startling than the most wonderful transformation scene, for it was more full of life and light, movement and reality.

Our coachman turned into the Rue Daunou, and so brought us to the Hôtel Chatham : quiet, comfortable, well ordered. The manager came forward, and received us with as much true *empressement* as though we had arrived for six months instead of a couple of hours. Here we would dine only, and so fortify ourselves for the night journey Southwards.

The *salle à manger* threw wide its hospitable doors, and a flood of light fell upon a number of small tables, upon snow white cloths and

sparkling glass and silver. Richly dressed ladies blazing with jewels alternately took up dainty mouthfuls, and fanned themselves with lazy grace. The most dressed and jewelled were of course American. At a quiet corner table sat two quiet people, evidently mother and daughter, since the one must have been twenty years ago what the other was now. These were English, as one saw and heard—we were at the very next table. No other country could produce that fair and modest specimen of girlhood—for say what you will there are a few modest girls amongst us still, who do not go in for independence and revolution. No other country could yield that lovely face, that sweet and gentle voice, those refined tones, which are partly inherited. No jarring of nerves here, no desire for sending on to the next compartment. A charmed atmosphere, making the sands of life all golden, running all too swiftly.

Then came up our cunning maître-d'hôtel, in faultless attire, portly, well-fed, in command. He deigned to look upon the wine card we were examining, and went in for a little Machiavellian policy. "Send us a bottle of your excellent '87 St. Julien," we said, knowing the wine well. "Ah, monsieur," returned this diplomatist, "if you only knew it, the Château d'Irrac is infinitely superior." "Is it possible?" we answered, incredulous but yielding; "then for once let it be Château d'Irrac."

And presently we realised that the '87 St. Julien was no doubt growing low in the cellar, whilst there were still many bins of Château d'Irrac, fat and overflowing and crying out to be consumed. We sent for the head waiter, and in confidence suggested our suspicions. "For," we added, "you cannot compare the two wines." "Monsieur, donc, knows the St. Julien?" said Machiavel. "Ah," with a keener glance, "I had not recognised monsieur. I ask pardon. After all, it is a matter of taste. The Château d'Irrac is certainly much appreciated—especially by the English. Monsieur will allow me to change the wine."

Could he say more? It was the amende honorable; but we would not accept the sacrifice, and the Château d'Irrac remained to grace our board.

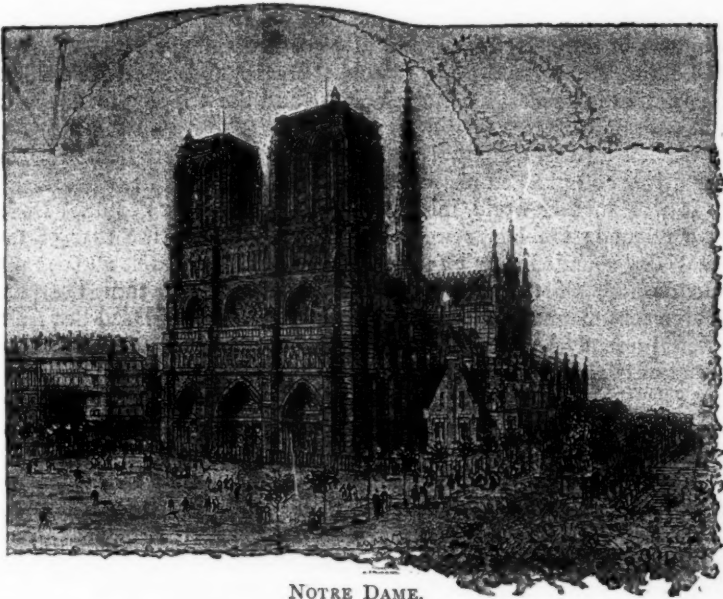
Then presently we entered upon our longer drive to the Gare d'Orléans. Paris had now put up her shutters and toned down her brilliancy. Shops were closed, lights were out, Vanity Fair was less in evidence.

As we went on, the streets grew more and more empty. Our driver found his way to the river, and went down the quays, where on summer evenings lovers of old books spend hours in examining the long rows of stalls, on which, sooner or later every known and unknown literary treasure seems to make its appearance. Perhaps he was a man who liked the tragic side of life—and where will it suggest itself more than on the banks of the Seine? Night after night its turbid waters close over the heads of the poor and the wretched.

The ghastly Morgue is weighted with untold secrets. Every bridge is surrounded by an atmosphere of despairing sighs. One last look upon the world, the sky, the quiet stars suggestive of peace and hope, and night after night, the fatal plunge is taken, the dark cold waters recover their serenity, and another soul has rashly braved the ills it knows not of.

Once more, right in front of us, uprose in the darkness the marvellous outlines of Notre Dame, in all the charm and beauty of its Gothic refinement. All its delicate lacework, its flying buttresses, stood out subdued to a dream under the night sky.

Who can look upon this architectural wonder without thinking of all the historical past? Of those twelfth-century days, when the first



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stone was laid, and it slowly rose to perfection? Of all the centuries that have since rolled on, changing and destroying much of its charm? Of the perils it went through and did not altogether escape in those terrible days of '93, when it was voted to destruction and saved by a miracle? That "age of reason," which proved its *raison-d'être* by driving half the excitable Frenchmen of Paris stark, staring mad.

Who can haunt these precincts without thinking of their high priest Victor Hugo, who loved them as Scott and Burns loved their healthier, wholesomer hills and valleys—the banks and braes of Bonny Doun? Everywhere uprises a vision of the old grey-headed man, as we now remember him, with the pale, heavy face, the grave and earnest manner, the deep and thoughtful eyes, and, on the surface, so little

about him that was light, and excitable and French. He seemed to be for ever pondering over the mysteries of life, of human suffering and endurance, of destinies for ever turning aside, the constant pursuit of substance, the grasping of shadows. His face seems to look at you from every dark and vacant window in the neighbouring Ile St. Louis. The shadow of Notre Dame falls upon its mediaeval roofs; the dark waters of the river wash their very foundations, and sometimes flood them also. If they could only whisper their secrets! The secrets of human sin and suffering; that great army of martyrs who have died not to uphold the good but in consequence of the evil. The accumulated record would surely stop the world in its course and bring all things to an end. Many a time has he stood contemplating these problems, arranging the destinies of his characters, from the windows of the Hôtel Lambert. Its painted ceilings recall the days of Lebrun, and up and down the old staircases and deserted corridors one hears the cynical laugh of Voltaire and the tripping footsteps of Madame de Châtet.

We left all this delightful and romantic atmosphere behind us, as our driver still pursued his way down the right bank of the Seine.

It was another world, inhabited almost by another people. Darkness reigned; the lamps were few and far between; the roar of the great city sounded afar off; and amidst that roar dwelt all the rank and fashion, all the wealth, all the intrigues that turn the pure heaven-sent manna of life to the bitterest ashes of the Dead Sea fruit. Then presently he crossed a bridge. We looked out and saw the gleam of lamps upon the dark waters below. The Seine was pursuing her relentless course, carrying her burden of sighs and sorrows to the far-off sea, burying them in the Ocean of Eternity, recording them in the Books of Heaven.

A few moments more, and we were at the Gare d'Orléans. We dismissed our man with his fare and a *pourboire*. This makes his happiness, and surely the small extra sum, which brings a gleam of joy to his weather-beaten face and a grateful acknowledgment, should teach us a lesson of humility.

We were in good time, and had the place almost to ourselves. "Le train n'est pas encore fait, monsieur," said a polite official, in answer to a question. "Ah! there it comes. You will not be overcrowded to-night, I imagine."

This was good hearing; a night journey in a full train where you have not a reserved carriage means a certain amount of martyrdom. We marked our seats, and then walked up and down the lighted platform. It was nearly ten o'clock, and passengers were arriving.

Presently H. C. detached himself from our safe escort. We turned and beheld him at the lower end of the train, apparently minutely examining the last carriage. We feared some untoward adventure—masculine, feminine, or neuter—we knew not what. With hastened footsteps and beating heart we went towards him. The hundred-and-

one occasions rose up before us in which we had saved him from ladies with matrimony on the brain, from intrigues, from his susceptible self. Only a year ago there had been that narrow escape in the Madrid hotel, with the houri who had married the Russian count. He saw us coming, and turned and met us with suppressed mischief gleaming in his eyes. What had he been guilty of now?

"Mentor," he said, placing his arm in ours, "come and see. But do not interfere with the liberty of the subject. I will not be controlled. You shall no longer find me the weak and yielding Telemachus of the years gone by. This time I have parted from my leading-strings for ever." All this went in at one ear and out at the other, as the homely saying runs. Silence is the best reply to all incipient insubordination.

We went to the last carriage and beheld the comedy. In one compartment sat two lovely ladies, only waiting the departure of the train to draw down the blinds, shield the lamp, and settle themselves for the night. H. C. silently pointed to the label, and our bewildered gaze read: *POUR FUMEURS*. Fortune seemed to have favoured his mischievous humour, for seldom if ever before had we seen such an announcement on a French carriage. Then he went on to the next compartment. Three young men had got into this, and were laughing, talking, blowing up clouds of smoke. This was labelled *POUR DAMES SEULES*. H. C. had quietly changed the iron labels and turned the world upside down. The inmates were all in blissful ignorance of the frightful thing that had happened.

"We had no time to go to the theatre to-night," said H. C., "yet I had a mind for a little comedy. Here we shall have it on the spot, and without paying. I had such trouble to ram the plaques into the grooves that they will never get them out again. Here comes the inspector—evidently a man not to be trifled with: exactly the man for the occasion. Now for it."

We trembled for the consequences as we saw the great man approaching. Each particular hair seemed to stand on end; we felt the pallor of death upon our cheek. Guiltless, our appearance would have condemned us. H. C. on the other hand was calmness and innocence itself.

Suddenly we saw the inspector give a start, which was exactly reproduced in us. In him it was a start of astonishment and indignation; in us, of nervous terror. Then the door of the compartment was thrown open, and the scene began. The inspector had a powerful bass voice which could make itself felt and heard.

"Gentlemen," he cried, in his deepest diapason, "what is the meaning of this? How dare you get into a compartment reserved for ladies only, and fill it with vile smoke, and treat with contempt the rules of our Organisation Department? For this, gentlemen," he continued, waxing wrath, and perhaps overstating his case, "I

could fine and summons you—and I believe that I should be justified in handing you over to the *Police Correctionnelle*. Your act is infamous—and no doubt designed."

Instead of pouring oil upon troubled waters, the young men were combative and defiant.

"Qu'est-ce que vous nous chantez là?" said one of them. "Surely, my dear inspector your sight is failing—time rolls on, you know; or you cannot read; or you have dined too well. But if you have your sight and senses about you, and examine the plaque closely, you will see that it states: *FOR SMOKERS*. And we are smokers. My compliments to you, Monsieur the famous Inspector. Like Dumas, we are here, and here we remain."

"This is very good," said H. C., looking on with his air of innocence. "If it were a scene at the Vaudeville, it would bring down the house and make the fortune of the piece. Mentor, you ought to be grateful to me for this little distraction, but you do not look it. It was all done so easily and naturally."

The inspector listened whilst this fuel was being added to the fire of his wrath. "We will see about that," he said. "Come out this instant, and read for yourself." He grasped the arm of the young man; and as he was strong and the youth was weak, the result was that Dumas' famous saying fell to the ground, and he with it. In a moment he stood upon the platform, and with his own eyes read the fatal notice.

"But it is conjuring, it is a miracle!" he cried. "I can assure you, Monsieur the Inspector, that before I got in I read the label with my own eyes—we all did. Anatole—de Verriers—I appeal to you for confirmation. It positively stated *FOR SMOKERS*. No, oh no, I am certain of it—and I have *not* dined too well," he added, laughing in spite of himself. "*FOR LADIES ONLY!* It is too good a joke. I assure you we want a quiet night's rest; we don't want to be disturbed by the gentle snoring of the fair sex. An enemy hath done this. Tenez, Monsieur the Inspector," going on to the next compartment and reading the label: "look at that. There are the innocent conspirators calmly seated in the compartment. It is the ladies themselves who have done this. I was wrong in saying it was an enemy, for are we not all the friends of the lovelier half of creation? But take my word for it, they are the culprits. Look how unconscious they look! one sees it is too natural to be real—it is put on. Poor ladies! They are nervous, perhaps, and want to feel protection and safeguard about them during the perilous night journey. Or it may be that they even like smoking. After all, it is a very innocent little ruse on their part to attain a very harmless end."

"Innocent, sir! harmless!" cried the outraged and perplexed inspector. "We will see about that."

He approached the compartment, threw wide the door, addressed

the ladies severely, as became his office, but tempered it with respect and admiration, as became a man.

"How is this, ladies?" he cried to the startled women. "Allow me to inform you that it is not *convenable* for members of your sex to deliberately compose themselves for the night in a compartment labelled *FOR SMOKERS*."

"What!" cried the ladies in a breath. "*FOR SMOKERS*? Quel horreur! Monsieur the Inspector, you must be mad, or you have dined too well—l'un ou l'autre. *For Smokers*! Why we are horrified at smoke. It makes me cough, it makes my companion sneeze, it gets into our hair, it ruins our complexion. Monsieur the Inspector," shaking out their ruffled plumage, "this is an infamous accusation. We feel ourselves insulted. We shall appeal for redress to the Chef de Gare. You had better at once say that



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we have done this thing ourselves, whilst the culprits are no doubt those three young men who are standing laughing behind you. You have attacked our reputation and we will pursue the matter. When we entered this compartment it was labelled *For Ladies Only*: and if you will examine the plaque with sober senses, you will find it still reads *For Ladies Only*."

"Mesdames," returned the bewildered inspector, "I will trouble you to alight and read for yourselves. No one shall accuse me of dining too well, with impunity; and no one, not even such charming women as yourselves, shall exact an apology for an offence I have never committed."

Apparently there was nothing else for it. The ladies gracefully alighted, assisted by the gallant but uncompromising inspector, and the fatal words stared them in the face.

"But it is conjuring, it is a miracle!" they cried breathlessly, just

as the young men had cried. "An enemy hath done this, Monsieur the Inspector, and the enemy is represented by those three young men who no doubt look upon this as a *petite plaisanterie*. But if there is law in the land, they shall suffer for it. It is nothing more or less than an outrage to our feelings. In the meantime, Monsieur the Inspector—not to delay the train—have the kindness to change back the labels to their right positions, and put those three young men under the surveillance of the guard."

"If it is the last word we ever speak, we are guiltless in this matter," protested the young men. "Mephistopheles is no doubt on the platform in disguise"—here we felt a nudge from H. C. and a whispered "Complimentary!"—"but we beg to say that we are not Fausts, and we have no reason to suppose that these ladies are Marguerites."

The outraged ladies could not reply; they were absolutely speechless with anger; twice they opened their mouths but no sound would come. And as the train was now about to start, there was nothing for it but to re-enter their compartment. The young men did likewise. The doors were closed. The inspector tried to remove the offending labels. They would not budge. He brought all his strength to bear upon them, but they were fixed as the stars in their course. If Mephistopheles had been at work, he had done his work well. The plaques might have been soldered in their sockets. The inspector was guilty of language that was not quite parliamentary. He felt mystified, baffled; the whole thing was inexplicable.

There came a cry down the platform: "En voiture, messieurs!" Our own carriage was some way off—we went up to it and entered it, providing ourselves with pillows for the night. Final doors were slammed; the train moved off. And the ladies were in a compartment labelled FOR SMOKERS, and the three young men had to themselves the carriage POUR DAMES SEULES. They must have been laughing immoderately, for the Inspector shook his fist at them as they slowly rolled away; and the shake said as plainly as though we had heard the words: "There go the culprits! Ah, scélérats! If I only had you now in my grasp!" The young men must have interpreted the action in like manner, for the window was suddenly put down and three hands waved him an energetic and affectionate farewell.

"As the curtain fell, the whole house came down with deafening applause, and the success of the play was assured," cried H. C. And then he threw himself back in his seat, and gave way to a prolonged fit of laughter. After which, he began to think of settling down for the night.

We rolled away in the darkness. The lights of Paris grew faint and dreamy and then went out. All the old familiar landmarks were invisible, and when we crossed the Seine not a star was reflected in its deep dark waters.

As the night went on we felt that we were passing through the

glorious country of the Orléanais, washed by the waters of the historical and romantic Loire. Who that has gone down its broad, winding course can forget all the charms of its ancient towns?—The halo surrounding Orléans, the refined accents of Tours, the architectural wonders of Loches, the home of the Plantagenets, its towers and churches visible even under the stars: and beyond Nantes, the gentle splendours of La Vendée. The porters in the darkness of night shouted out "Orléans!" and we felt that we were in the very garden of France. Here nature is so bountiful that the hand of man is hardly needed to produce the fruits of the earth. Here in these sunny provinces dwell the happiest and most light-hearted of the sons of France. The earth furnishes them in abundance with their daily bread and wine. It comes to them without trouble and it is eaten without care.

Night and darkness rolled away. We approached Bordeaux. Last year, at this same hour, about this same time, we had found it enveloped in mist. We had made the acquaintance of Monsieur le Comte San Salvador de la Veronnière, and wondered how his small body bore the weight of this majestic name. But the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb, and the back is fitted to the burden. This time there was no comte and no mist. We had watched the dawn break, and then a glorious sunrise flush the Eastern sky, turning the fleecy clouds into flaming swords. The earth woke up, and the lovely woods and forests with their wealth of fern and bracken were touched with a rosy glowing light, as the sun shot up above the horizon.

Just before reaching Bordeaux we made a startling discovery. Some secret impulse caused us to examine our luggage-ticket, and we were electrified at finding that it had been registered to Irun instead of to Portbou. We steamed into the crazy old station, found out the station-master, and explained the difficulty. He was kindness and politeness itself; and once more we could not help contrasting the courtesy of the French officials with the abrupt incivility of the Spanish.

"This would have been serious," said M. le Chef. "I am glad you found it out in time, for after Bordeaux it would have been too late. You and your luggage would have gone your separate ways." Then calling up a porter, he handed him the ticket, bade him search the luggage-vans and bring away the numbers indicated.

"This is a little against the rules," said the Chef, smiling; "but life is full of inevitable exceptions, and it is because we stick to too much red tape, and will not recognise the need of these exceptions that half life's worries occur."

Evidently our Chef was a philosopher, and fortunately for us a man of common-sense.

Presently up came the porter. His search had been successful. The luggage was re-registered for Portbou, and we had the satisfaction

of thanking M. le Chef for sparing us a very awkward dilemma. "Monsieur," he replied with a finished French bow, "it is always a pleasure to be of use, and I am ever at your disposition."

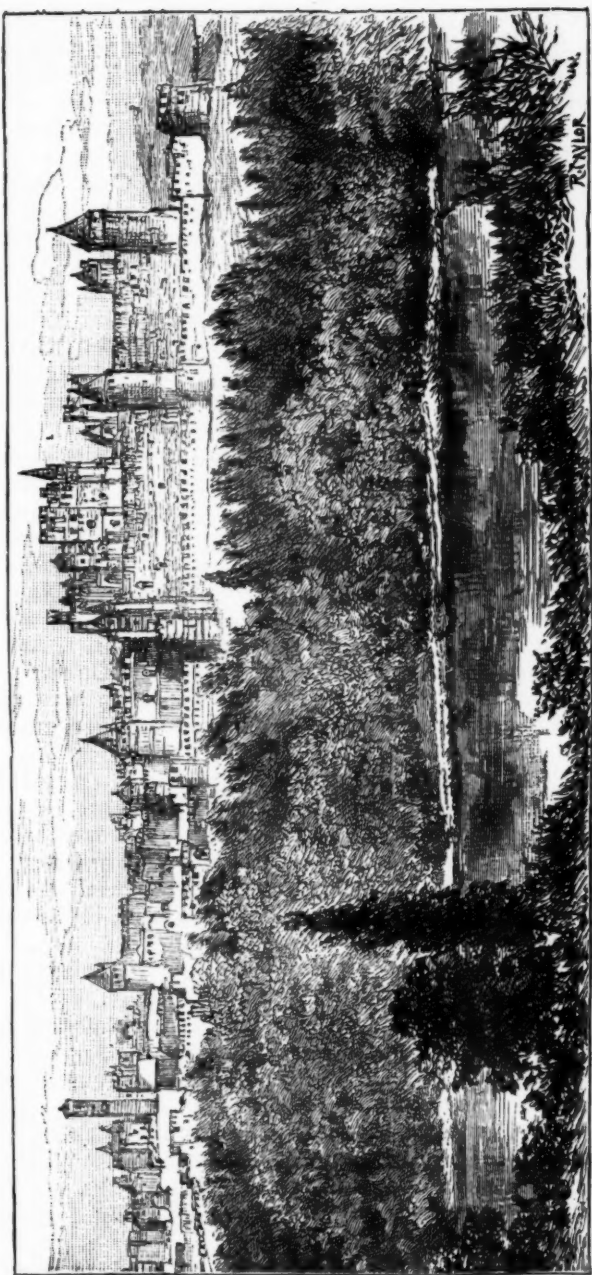
The train left the station and crossed the lordly Garonne. Nothing in the way of rivers could look more majestic, with all the light of the sky and all the blue of the heavens reflected on its broad surface. Once more we were dazzled by the rich splendour of the autumn tints. In the vineyards the deep purple leaves still lingered upon the branches. The white farm-houses with their green shutters and red-tiled roofs, and strings of yellow Indian maize, and heaps of pumpkins, stood out in splendid contrast with the landscape. Many a vine-laden porch threw its lights and shades upon walls and pavement. Many a field was picturesque with ploughing-oxen. A hardy and picturesque son of the south guided the furrow, and a woman with a red or blue cotton handkerchief tied round the head followed, sowing the seed. One only wanted the Angelus bell and the bowed head to add to the devotion of the scene.

All this we had found a year ago. Nothing was altered, and it seemed but as yesterday. But now we were changing our direction, and going east instead of westward. Last year Irun and St. Sebastian had been our first destination; now it was Gerona, and Barcelona the bright and pleasant, for ever associated in heart and mind with Majorca the beautiful and beloved.

As the hours went on and the sun was declining we found ourselves looking upon the wonderful old city of Carcassonne.

Rising out of the plain was the great limestone rock crowned by this fortress of the Middle Ages. Its walls and round towers were clearly outlined against the blue sky. These enclose a dead world given up to the poor and the struggling. Its steep, narrow streets have no longer the faintest shadow or echo of its past military glories. The inner walls date back to the Visigothic Kings; the foundations of some of the towers are Roman, nothing about any part of the walls seems later than the twelfth century. Here in 1210 came the army of Crusaders under Simon de Montfort, and laid siege. The cruel Abbot of Citeaux was amongst the most determined of the besiegers. The massacre at Beziers had just taken place, and he had been amongst the most eager to shed blood. Many who had escaped had gone to this little City of Refuge, amongst whom was the brave Vicomte de Beziers: one of those men, of whom the world has seen not a few, who save others' lives at the expense of their own. The little fortress unable to hold out was taken, and again the massacre was terrible: Beziers himself dying in prison after much suffering.

A hundred and fifty years later it more successfully resisted the Black Prince, who after scattering terror and triumphing right and left in the plains of Languedoc, found that he had to retire from these walls baffled and mortified. To-day they still stand, the most picturesque and perfect mediæval monument in France.



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The new town—as quietly industrious as the old city is silent and dead: as modern and commonplace as the other is ancient and romantic—lies in the plain. Trees overshadow the boulevards, and costly fountains plash refreshingly through the hot days and nights of summer; and running streams make the air musical and reflect the sapphire skies.

On one side runs the great Canal du Midi, the Canal des Deux Mers, as it is also called, uniting the Mediterranean with the Atlantic. When made, two hundred and fifty years ago, it was one of the most splendid engineering works the world had seen, and perhaps would never have been finished but for the encouragement of le Grand Monarque: prime mover in that *age d'or* when the literary firmament was studded with such stars of the first order as Molière, Corneille, Lafontaine, Bossuet, Fénelon, Pascal, and last, not least, Madame de Sévigné. Place aux dames! What a crowd of splendours, what a succession of startling events, came into that lengthened reign, in which our own Marlborough took his part in such decisive battles as Blenheim and Malplaquet.

This Canal du Midi, reflecting the outlines of Carcassonne, added much to the trade of the South of France. If that has declined amidst the world's chances and changes, its numerous barges plying to and fro with sails set to the evening breeze and the setting sun, still form one of Earth's rarest and most beautiful scenes, full of calm repose. Corn and wine and oil are their freights; rich Argosies commanded by many a modern Jason, carrying many a Golden Fleece to all the fair and flourishing towns that lie in its path between the tideless shores of the Levant and the bold and restless waters of Biscay.

On the other side of the town runs the River Aude, also reflecting the ancient outlines of Carcassonne in its waters that are less placid than those of the Great Canal. This takes its way through a fertile valley given up to vines and olives, fig-trees and pomegranates; and here in the season flock crowds of invalids to the mineral baths and waters, penances due to the indiscretions of the table, or the sins of their forefathers.

Our train rolled over both these "waterways," and went on its road towards Narbonne.

By this time we had realised that we had been misinformed as to the hour when we should reach Gerona, our first resting-place, thus adding one more to our small chapter of accidents. Arrived at Narbonne we had the good fortune to find a Chef de Gare as civil and obliging as he of Bordeaux. We learned it was impossible to reach Gerona that day—there was no railway communication. We should have to spend the night at Portbou, the Spanish frontier, where our quarters would be wretched, and all our sweet be turned to bitter against those who had misled us.

We made our decision at once. "Better remain here, where at

least there is a good inn, than go on to the miseries of Portbou," we said to M. le Chef.

"That is clear," he replied. "Here you will be comfortable—and on French ground," he added laughing: "a virtue in my eyes, and I hope in yours also." We bowed a willing assent.

"But our luggage," we said. "It is registered to Portbou."

He looked grave. "That is unfortunate," he returned. "It must go on to Portbou. I cannot give it you. It is against all rules. I regret it greatly."

"We cannot do without it," we pleaded. "If you send it on to Portbou, we cannot remain behind. Have you the heart to consign us to that *chambre de tortures*?"

He paused a moment, revolving the momentous situation: if not the fate of an Empire, at least a distinct question of precedence. "No," he laughed at length, "I cannot do that. I will for once make an exception in your favour. Advienne que pourra, you shall have your luggage."

And then in the kindest manner he personally superintended the matter, delayed the train until the luggage was found, and carried out sundry forms necessary for the next day's journey.

We found very little in Narbonne to repay us for our change of plans: but the hotel was comfortable and the energetic landlady was distinctly a character worth studying. Grass certainly never grew under her feet. She seemed gifted with a ubiquitous presence, and startled one with the rapidity of her motions. A capable woman it was good to encounter, who made her little world about her work with a will. Figuratively speaking, she wound them up, and set them going, and if the machinery showed signs of flagging, the master-key was quickly applied, and the wheels went on again.

To-day she was on her metal, as she informed us, having a large wedding dinner on hand. "To-night was the *diner de contrat*," she said, "to-morrow the *diner de nocce*. A hundred and fifty people would sit down to it, and she expected great conviviality."

Nor was she disappointed, if later on the noise we heard was any sign of festive enjoyment. Loud laughter, shouting, applause, healths pledged and good wishes freely bestowed—all these represented happiness in the assembled guests.

Madame had taken us into the banquet-room, to show us that she was capable of decorating her table very effectively. Glass and silver glittered under the rays of light. Flowers perfumed the air; orange-trees stood in corners, and fruit and blossom mingled their appropriate charms. We asked for whom was all this extensive preparation.

"The daughter of an innkeeper, with a magnificent dowry was marrying one of the most popular and skilful doctors of the place. But it was really a marriage d'amour, not only de convenance. *Les mariés* were both of them delightful. One hardly knew which to

congratulate the most. In short it was one of those rare events in life when the social sky was without a cloud and its sunshine had no shadow."

Madame was almost poetical in her enthusiasm. But she was no less practical, for it was wonderful how everything went smoothly under her guidance.

"Narbonne, celebrated for its honey." We seemed to remember that this had been one of our geographical items in days gone by. "But where was the honey?" we asked during the course of our own dinner, which Madame was quite equal to, in spite of the greater ceremony.

"You may well ask," she returned, placing upon the table a choice bottle of the *vin du pays*, which she saw unsealed and uncorked by one of her officials who had just been wound up again, and was flying about the room like a firework. "You may well ask. No house so badly supplied with coals as the *charbonnier*, and in Narbonne we see little of our own honey. Like the fish in a seaport town, it is all exported, and you will find more of it in Paris than you will here. But I will try to unearth a pot from my stores."

Apparently the quest was not successful, for the honey was not forthcoming. Or it may be that in contemplation of the rising *lune de miel* in the garlanded banquetting-room, the more material article passed out of mind. With one hundred and fifty people on her brain no wonder if small matters were passed over. And yet Madame seemed of those who forget nothing: one of those rare beings who possess a faculty both for broad organisation and minute details. A thin, wiry woman, with a quick walk and a light step; with dark eyes that nothing escaped; yet without staring and with no sharpness of manner. Only once did we hear her rebuking one of her waiters, and that was for procrastination.

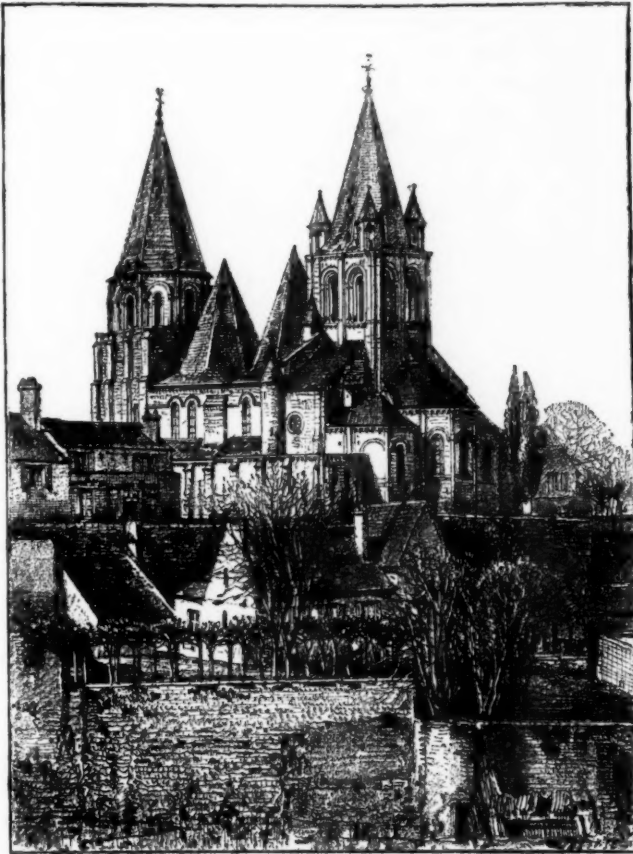
"Leave nothing till to-morrow that can be done to-day," she wound up with, "or you will soon find that the world has got ahead of you, and you are left far behind in the race. Those are the people that come to poverty, and they have only themselves to thank for it. That, *monsieur*," she added, turning to us who stood by waiting a direction, "is the reason that we cannot very much help what are called the poor. Some great reason brings them to that condition—laziness, stupidity, or vice: and your help will never give them energy, wisdom, or virtue."

The direction we were waiting for was with regard to the town, and the erring waiter was ordered to show us the way to the Cathedral.

In the town itself we found very little that was not ordinary and commonplace. It is ancient, and its streets are winding and tortuous, and yet it possesses scarcely anything in the way of picturesque outlines, and nothing in the way of Roman remains. Yet it was great and flourishing as far back as the fifth century B.C.: and in the first century was in the hands of the Romans, great in theatres,

baths, temples and triumphal arches. Of these not a vestige remains.

It was one of the great ports of the Mediterranean, which then flowed up to its foundations, but has gradually receded some eight miles away. From the top of one of the quaint towers of the Hôtel de Ville you may trace the outlines of the Cevennes and the Pyrenees



LOCHES.

on the one side, and on the other watch the broad blue waters, more beautiful than a dream in their deep sapphire, shimmering in the sunshine ; you may count the white-winged boats sailing lazily to and fro upon its flashing surface ; and on still dark nights, when the stars are large and brilliant, watch the lights of fishing fleets clustered together, and hear upon the shore the gentle plash of this tideless sea.

On such summer nights the *Allée des Soupirs* is the favourite and frequented walk. Whence its sad and romantic name? Has it seen an unusual number of sorrows? Do ghosts of the past haunt it, making known their presence by long-drawn sighs? Has it had more than its share of Abelards and Heloïses, of Romeos and Juliettes? Has some sorrowful Atala been borne under its branches to a lonely and desert grave, or some Dante mourned here his lost Beatrice?

We turned our backs upon this *Allée des Soupirs* when we climbed the ill-paved streets towards the Cathedral: a Cathedral no longer, for Narbonne once an Archbishopric has been shorn of all ecclesiastical pomp and dignity.

As far as it went, we found it a very fine and interesting Gothic building, of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. But it was never finished. Little beyond the choir exists; a splendid fragment, which causes a keen regret that it is a fragment only. Completed it might have been one of the world's wonders.

We entered it for the second time in the gloom of evening, and its great height was lost in shadows. A few lights about the church and on the altar deepened the sense of mystery. A few kneeling figures motionless at their devotions added their quiet pathos to the scene. We went down to the very end of the choir, and stood and looked eastward. It had the effect of a vast illimitable church, infinitely impressive. An immense nave with aisles and pillars and vaulted roofs might have stretched behind us. This was the first intention of the architect. It was to have been. In reality there was nothing. Within a few feet of where we stood there came the narrow outer passage and the dead wall of the west front. But looking eastward all this was not realised. We only saw the splendid choir, the vast height, the light and graceful outlines, the groined roof, the pointed arches, the slender pillars. All was steeped in the mystery and shadow of a dim religious light by the few candles that gleamed here and there like faint stars in the night. Some of the painted glass was beautiful, as we had seen before darkness fell, and much of the sixteenth-century flamboyant tracery was very good. There were many fine tombs and statues.

The Gothic Hôtel de Ville close by is partly modern. Some portion of it was the ancient Archbishop's palace, and some of this remains, more particularly the old towers. The Courtyard has a few interesting outlines, and the staircase leading to the museum is broad and massive in its marble grandeur. Up and down these stairs and corridors was once wont to pass the proud footstep of an Archbishop, the head bowed under the Cardinal's red hat, whilst the rustle of silken robes, white and scarlet, seemed to whisper of greatness. But now it shines by the light of other days. All its pomp and pride have departed; it looks dead and silent and deserted; its glory has been transferred to Toulouse, where the Archbishop now holds his see.

We discovered the ancient dame who keeps the keys of the museum. She dwells in almost an underground room of the building, a distant wing in the garden, where in days gone by the Archbishop was wont to pace and meditate in the seclusion of sheltering grooves enclosed in high impenetrable walls. Looking upwards nothing would arrest the eye but the far-off serene sky, and the unfinished fragment of the Cathedral. It is still a grey and venerable pile this wing, silent and empty.

But in the quiet little lodge of the custodian hearts still beat to the tune of life's small dramas. A slight altercation was going on. The dame was laying down the law to a young man, evidently her son. What the transgression we could not tell. Possibly he was in debt, and had come to draw upon the hard-earned savings in the chimney-corner. This to the frugal mother-mind would represent a sort of mental and moral earthquake. Perhaps he had come to announce his marriage with one who would make him a bad wife. It might be that he had grown tired of his narrow world and was pleading for permission to cross the seas and begin a new life on a new soil. Whatever it was he departed looking very much as if he too had his burden to bear. As he passed us he bowed and said "Bonjour, Messieurs," and his looks were comely and his voice was pleasant. He had somewhat the air of a sailor, and possibly was a fisherman, living much of his life in the little port eight miles off. He disappeared beyond the trees, and the old mother, who must also have been comely in her day, took the keys, and conducted us up the broad marble staircase to the museum. The shades of evening were gathering, and our visit would almost have been lost labour, but that there was little else to do. We thought we discovered a few good old pictures amidst a great amount of rubbish, yet it was almost too dark to form a correct judgment.

Long after the sun had set and the afterglow had faded we went back to the hotel, and dinner, and Madame's hospitable attentions.

She was determined we should not suffer from the demands of the banquet. The whole corridor was now lined with orange trees, so that from the entrance to the banquetting-room the procession would walk up in a sort of cornucopia of peace and plenty. The effect was charming and bridal. Nothing can be more beautiful than the luscious, perfumed blossoms, nothing richer than the deep green foliage, nothing more picturesque than the scented golden fruit hanging gracefully from the branches. As the evening went on, the distant sounds of merriment increased. Champagne could not run like water without leading to noisy if not brilliant wit. A hundred and fifty sons and daughters of the sunny South of France would certainly make the most of their opportunity. If now and then, in some special applause or universal burst of laughter, one thought of Pandemonium it was almost with a joy that there are times when it is possible for the burden of life to be thrown aside for a brief

interval, a moment's oblivion of To-morrow with its faded roses and garlands.

We left them to their Bacchanalian devotions, when by-and-by the clock struck ten, and the lights began to burn dim, and we realised that a night spent in the train is more or less a night of vigil. We bade Madame Bon-soir, who was constantly going to and fro like a lightning flash, yet neither hurried nor flurried, and she politely returned us the Bonne-nuit; adding with a certain dry humour that after all she was glad marriage dinners were not an everyday occurrence—at any rate from her hotel. If they were profitable, they were also fatiguing.

The next morning we rose before the dawn. The man came in, lighted our candles, and informed us that it was time to get up. We thought we had been asleep five minutes, so quickly had the night passed. Overnight we had decided to take an early train and devote a few hours to Perpignan: hours of enforced waiting on our way to Gerona. H. C. after an amount of rapping and calling that might have awakened the dead, had got up, lighted his own candles, and protested against such tyranny by going back to bed and to sleep. Fortunately the man went up again a quarter of an hour after with his boots, and seeing the state of affairs, upset the fire-irons, knocked down a couple of chairs, let off six caps from a miniature revolver, and opened the window with a loud rattle.

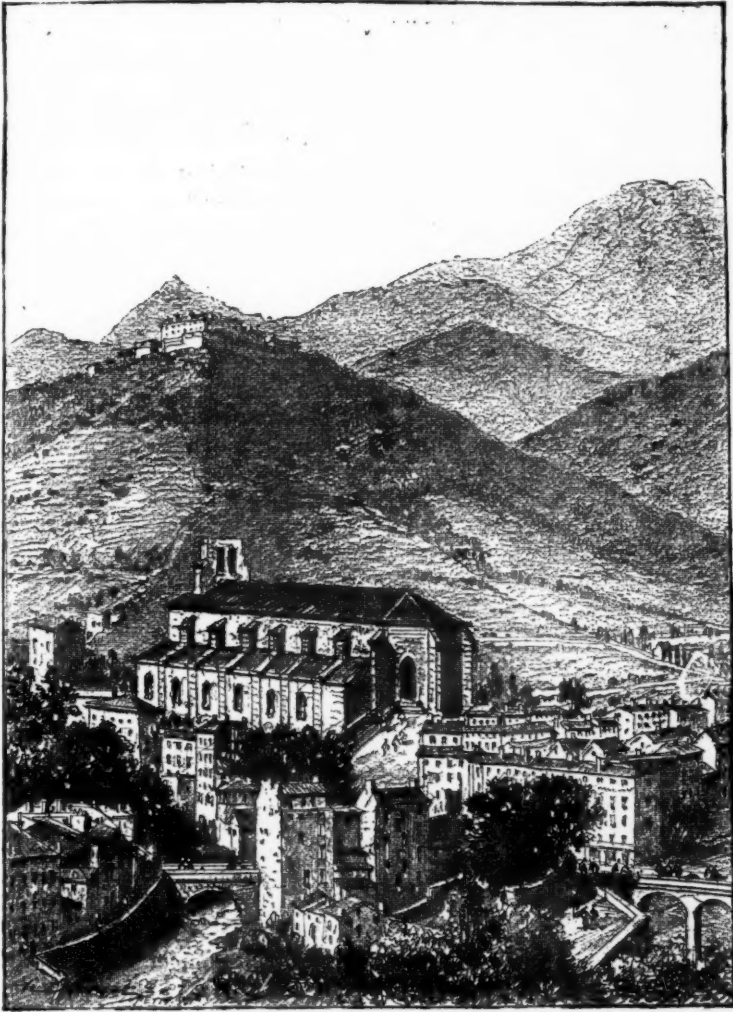
"Are those wedding people still at it?" murmured H. C., half asleep and half awake. "It must be past midnight?" And then consciousness dawned upon him, and the full measure of his iniquity; and presently he came down to a late breakfast with a great gash in his chin through hurried shaving.

Early as it was when we appeared upon the scene of action, Madame was at her post, as brisk and as wide awake as though yesterday had been nothing but a fête day. It was that uncomfortable hour, when the first light of morning is creeping in, making candles and gas-lamps pale and cold and unearthly. A battle is going on between night and day, and night raises the siege, and day wins the victory. The room looked chilly and forsaken; that *last-night* aspect which is so ghostlike and depressing and unfamiliar. A white mist hung over everything outside.

Then the most comforting thing on earth made its triumphant entry—a steaming teapot: and with the aid of tea tabloids—that most precious invention—a magnificent brew of the cup which cheers sent up our mental barometer to Fair Weather. We were even admitted to the internal economy of the establishment. In came the baker with a huge basket of hot, steaming rolls and *croissants*, giving out a delicious odour of bread fresh from the oven. With excellent butter—the last we tasted for many a long day—we made a breakfast fit for the ambrosial days of Olympus. In a few minutes Madame, cloaked and bonneted, came up to wish us Bon voyage: with a hope

that we should again visit Narbonne. Nothing is certain in this world or we should have told her it was a very forlorn hope.

"I have to go to market," she said, "and the sooner I am there



PERPIGNAN AND THE PYRENEES

the better my choice of provisions. To-day, too, I have my *diner de noce*, and must be back early. Vraiment, c'est une charge! Ah! how they enjoyed themselves last night! What headaches to-day,

je parie, in spite of the excellence of the wine. Enfin ! Il faut payer pour ses plaisirs."

"But, Madame," we remarked, "you are perpetual motion. You go to bed late—if you go to bed at all, which we begin to doubt—and are up early. This morning you look as fresh as a rose. Have you the gift of eternal youth?"

Madame was not above a compliment, and smiled her pleasure. "Quant il y a de la bonne volonté——" she laughed. "There is the whole secret. And now, au revoir, messieurs. Bon voyage. Portez vous bien. My best wishes go with you."

"Au revoir on one condition," we replied. "That the next time we come you present us without fail with a pot of Narbonne honey."

Madame uttered a cry, fell back a pace or two, struck her forehead reproachfully, and disappeared like a flash into the street. Up rattled the omnibus, absorbing ourselves and our traps. Narbonne was of the past.

A comparatively short journey landed us at an early hour at Perpignan. We had passed nothing very interesting on the road, for just here the Sunny South seems rather to have stayed her rich and bountiful hand. The low bare outlines of the rocky Corbières might be traced, and great stretches of heath, where the bees gather their famous honey—which we were not permitted to enjoy. Here and there immense salt lakes, giving the country a very flooded appearance, and causing much fever to the neighbourhood. We had once passed these endless tracks of lake districts in the night, and weird and solemn and mysterious they appeared, and we wondered what they could be. It all looked like a boundless world under water, reflecting the stars; whilst here and there the black outline of some small boat was visible, with the flash of a low-lying lamp streaming over its surface. And presently, this morning, there was the lovely sea, the blue Mediterranean, to make up for all other shortcomings.

Then Perpignan. This time we separated from our precious traps, which went on to Portbou to await our afternoon arrival.

We felt we ought to know Perpignan, and with affection, for it was once the residence of the kings of our beloved Majorca. But that was seven hundred years ago, and it has since gone through many changes, at the hands of many masters. For centuries it belonged to Spain, and still looks more a Spanish than a French town. Only in the middle of the seventeenth century was it finally annexed to France by Richelieu. Its streets are narrow, and in summer covered with awnings, many of its buildings are Moresque, and its houses have the iron and wooden balconies and the courts, so common to Spain. Here and there its thoroughfares are picturesque and arcaded, and every now and then you come upon an assemblage of wonderful roofs with their red tiles, and gorgeous creepers, and enormous vines; but they are the exception. It is strongly fortified, and some of the old gateways are interesting. In days gone by these fortifications were

needed, for Perpignan was the great point of defence in the East Pyrenees between France and Spain. The Cathedral is chiefly famous for the immense span of its vault. In this it somewhat resembles Majorca, but is infinitely less beautiful.

Even more dead and quiet, though larger, did Perpignan seem than Narbonne, whilst its inn, in front of the canal, was distinctly less comfortable. There was no energetic hostess to wind up the human wheels of the establishment and keep them going. But the head waiter made up for a good deal, and his distress at the smallness of our appetite and our rejection of black pudding (we shudder as we write) was as genuine as it was amusing. From the citadel we gazed far and wide over the plains of Roussillon, so famous for its vineyards and its wines.

But we had soon exhausted the merits of Perpignan, and when the hour for departure struck it found us ready. Actually at the moment we were seated in the great courtyard, watching the chef in white cap and apron on the opposite side at a small table, enjoying his dessert and his hour of repose, to which coffee and cognac formed the appropriate conclusion. For that hour he was a gentleman of golden leisure, and he had earned his ease.

We mourned that we had not had time to visit Elne with its old Romanesque Cathedral and its cloisters worth a king's ransom. Keener than ever was the regret as we passed it in the train, and noticed its decayed old-world aspect, its wonderful outlines. As it rose on its eminence, it looked a rare and ravishing twelfth-century vision. Here Hannibal encamped two hundred years before our present dispensation, on his way to Rome. Here came Constantine and named it Elena in memory of his mother—has not every great man had a great and good mother who has been his life's strength and ideal? Here the Emperor Constantine was basely assassinated by the order of Maxensius. Here came the Moors in the eighth century, the Normans in the eleventh, and the kings of France in the thirteenth, fifteenth and seventeenth centuries: all more or less destructive in their changes.

And now it remains a small dead town, with grass growing in its streets, where reigns a silence that may be felt. As we passed away from it, we noted how its clear outlines stood out against the blue sky of the South, and how beyond it stretched the calm and wondrous sapphire waters of the Mediterranean.

The train hurried on, and so must we, for our space draws to a close. The pen has been very treacherous, and lingered on the road, and we have not yet reached the faintest outlines of Spain: or if we have seen them, we have not passed into them. But at Cerbère we bade farewell to pleasant France; to a language that rings like music in our ears; to a people with whom we are at one, and for whom we have a sincere affection.

It was strange how, in the space of a few years as it were, we passed

from one country and people and tongue to another. Arrived at Portbou, without thinking we addressed a long sentence in French to one of the officials. He listened in patience to the end, then shook his head and said "Non comprendo." We realised that we were in Spain, the land of slow trains, of abrupt officials, of many discomforts—but of ROMANCE.

The shades of night were falling. In the douane we found our luggage, and it was satisfactorily examined and cleared. Like the ancient lady with the flaxen wig at Calais, we had neither brandy, cigars nor tea in hidden recesses. But we had tea-tabloids comfortably reposing in our pockets. Here was *multum in parvo*, and we felt with a certain elation that we were legitimately circumventing the enemy.

Once more we thought fate was going to be against us. As inevitably as the slippers turned up in the Eastern story, so it seemed that our luggage was destined to be the *bête noire* of our wanderings.

"You wish to go to Gerona," said the station-master himself, "but your ticket only states Barcelona. Therefore if you break your journey at Gerona, your luggage must go on to the further town."

As before we represented that this was impossible; and as before we conquered. "For this time I yield," said the Chef; "I make an exception in your favour; but you will have trouble at Gerona." All this had taken time, and the train moved off as we entered it.

At eight o'clock we reached Gerona, and even in the darkness could see its wonderful outlines; its countless reflections in the river that rolled below. The station was in an uproar. Crowds of people, young men and old, surged to and fro. Deafening shouts arose within and without the building. What was the matter and what could it mean? We gave a shrewd guess and found we were right. Conscripts were going off by the train, and all this crowd and noise was meant to encourage them. It was a farewell ovation, in which the conscripts themselves joined uproariously. In getting on to the platform, we almost fell against two stalwart old men, who stood out conspicuously above the crowd. Each had evidently come to see off a son. One of them was especially typical of a Catalonian, with his strongly-marked features, broad-brimmed hat, and picturesque costume. His friend called him Pedro. They had probably grown up together from boyhood, grown old together, and now life and youth and the heritage of the world were being handed down in their boys—who no doubt troubled themselves very little about the matter.

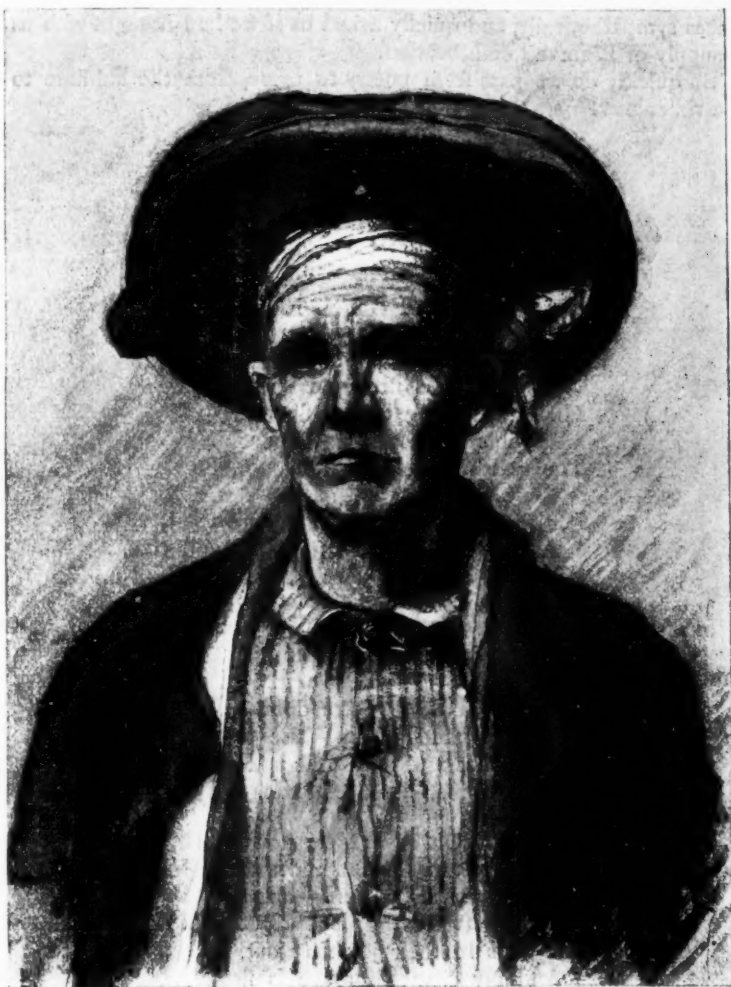
We managed to make our way into the luggage-room. "Ah!" cried the porter, looking at our tickets; "this is incorrect. This cannot be passed." And he turned to the superintendent.

"Away with you, man," cried the latter with an impatient gesture. "Do you think I can be troubled with luggage on a night like this? Take it where the gentlemen desire you!"

Once more we were saved. As we walked outside through the

crowd, a deafening cheer was raised, prolonged, enthusiastic. H. C. who was behind, hastened up to us.

"What can it mean?" he said. "Do you think they have discovered that I am a poet, and that all this is a little delicate attention



PEDRO.

on their part? If so, I must say that they are very polite and appreciative. Perhaps my volume of Lyrics dedicated to my aunt, Lady Maria, has been translated into Spanish, and has—ahem!—found more popularity here than at home. Ah!—Oh!"

The latter exclamations were caused by the sudden tearing off of the omnibus we had entered, whereby H. C. found himself sprawling on the floor in a most unpoetical attitude. He picked up his body as soon as he could collect his mind, and replacing himself in his seat as carefully as if he had been made of delicate china, rubbed his bruised knees sympathetically, and quietly asked us if we had brought with us a supply of Elliman's embrocation.

So quickly do we pass from poetry to prose, from the sublime to the ridiculous!

NEW YEAR'S EVE.

THE Old Year came to the door:
His step was firm and bold,
His icicles hung to the floor,
But his heart was never a-cold.
The bells in their joy rang out,
And his days were all too few,
For the Old Year's friends were tried,
And the Old Year's friends found true.

And the New Year comes to-night,
But my thoughts they will not rest,
For down in my secret heart
I love the Old Year best.
New faces crowd to the door,
Strange hands press—false or true?
And I shrink with a chill and a start,
As a woman is sure to do.

Old Year! Old Year! ere you pass
From me to the unknown dark,
I would whisper a word—alas!
Of regrets for the past. But hark!
The bells in their joy ring out,
And my chance for aye is fled,
For the New Year comes with a shout,
And the dear Old Year is dead.

A. E. G.

AN EDITOR'S STORY.

BY C. N. CARVALHO.

"WHAT a strange thing," murmured Gregory Manvers, as he turned the last leaf of a type-printed manuscript that lay on the desk before him. Now who can have written this?"

It was a short sketch entitled "Is it too Late?" the record of a love scornfully cast away, and of consequent regret and suffering. A common theme enough, and not one calculated to touch the heart of a man accustomed to pass hours of each day in reading similar effusions. But for all that our editor knitted his brows as he read, pressed his lips together, and finally dropped a tear upon the paper.

Was it only a coincidence, he wondered, or had someone who knew the story of his past life been cruel enough to trade upon it? For the first chapter was almost a transcript of what had passed between Helen Blakemore and himself scarcely three years ago. There, it must be owned, the resemblance ceased. Helen, he reminded himself, was not one to repent, as the heroine of this poor little sketch had done, still less to acknowledge her error. Pride was her besetting sin—the North Pole must touch the South before she would admit she had been in the wrong.

He turned the roll hastily to find the name and address of the writer. But it afforded no clue. It was only signed with initials, and directed to a remote post-office in the North of England, to be left till called for.

In an ordinary way, a type-printed manuscript was distinctly welcome to this weary editor; but to-day, he was rather inclined to regret it had not been penned in the usual fashion—something might have been deduced from the handwriting. Small and neat, it would be the work of a man (and wouldn't he like to twist the fellow's neck for having tried, even if unconsciously, to make his—Gregory Manvers'—affairs, public property). Big, bold, and black, it would come from the pen of a woman. They all wrote alike nowadays, and the bigger and the blacker, the more illegible was the work they produced.

But this clear, blue print presented no evidence of any kind. The most exciting scenes were depicted as steadily, as neatly, as coldly, as the most insignificant ones. It might be the work of the author; it might be that of a copyist. The Sphinx herself could not be more impenetrable than was that printed page.

That the sketch was unsuitable he saw at a glance. Setting aside his natural reluctance to bring it before the public, it was too long,

too diffuse ; it had a dozen faults that disqualified it for the pages of the journal he conducted. So with fingers that trembled slightly, he wrote on it in pencil No. 3854, put it into the drawer set aside for rejected communications, and took another manuscript from the pile at his side.

For hours after that our editor worked on, writing, reading, answering questions ; and except that he was a little short-tempered, no one remarked anything unusual in his demeanour. But the incident of the morning had not been forgotten. When his work was done and he was about to leave the office, he extracted the sketch 3854 from the drawer, and transferred it to the pocket of his overcoat.

"I need not return it yet," he said grimly as he did this. "I have only had it a few days."

Ere Gregory Manvers slept that night, he had taken a copy of that little sketch. He was wont to say he never remembered for an hour the plot of any love tale, but this one was surely an exception to that rule. His task completed, he lay back in his chair, and, shading his eyes from the light, fell to reviewing his past life, and wondering if Helen, knowing as she must have known long since that he had only told her the simple truth, was still implacable. If he, following the advice given by the author of the sketch, were to cast pride from him, and plead his cause once more, would it be of any avail ? But it was useless to dwell on this. He knew not where to find her. After the rupture of their engagement, she had gone with her parents to reside abroad, and he had lost sight of her.

The facts were these. A cousin of his, bearing the same name, had been guilty of obtaining money on false pretences, and had fled the country. Through the contrivance of the real culprit, the public were led to believe Manvers was the defaulter, and the Blakemores, hearing the report, demanded an explanation. Circumstantial evidence chanced to be strong against the editor, and he found it difficult to prove his innocence. He had never spoken to the Blakemores of this cousin, and they were not very willing to believe in the existence of such a person. The upshot was a serious quarrel, ending in his engagement to Miss Blakemore being broken off. Deeply offended that Helen, at least, would not trust his word, he accepted his dismissal without making any further effort to clear himself, and strove to be content with the recollection that the law proceedings, when published in due course in the newspapers, would exonerate him from all blame.

It had been hard to banish these events from his mind at the time ; it was next to impossible now ; but he struggled manfully to do it ; and when autumn came, betook himself to Switzerland for his annual holiday, thinking a thorough change would be beneficial to both body and mind. But by an untoward accident, he sprained his ankle so severely, that he was kept a prisoner to the sofa for some weeks, and

thus had more leisure to brood over his misfortunes than was good for him. He was wholly dependent for amusement on the kindness of the visitors staying in the hotel; many of whom were exceedingly polite and attentive; one in particular—a young German of the name of Müller—coming to the invalid's room at all hours, and bringing him the gossip of the place.

"I can't stay now, Mr. Manvers," this young fellow cried one morning as he rushed in with a pile of newspapers and periodicals under his arm. "I'm off for the Gormer Grate with those men I told you of last night—the weather is glorious. But I have done my best for you. Everybody is out, so I've made a clean sweep of the English things on the reading-room table, and here they are. Good-bye. I'll look you up directly I come back."

As a rule Manvers made a point of eschewing all periodical literature during his holiday, but just now he had little else to divert him; so when he had finished his correspondence, he opened the least trashy of the reviews and began to read an article by one of the leading politicians of the day. He waded through it with praiseworthy perseverance; then, noticing there were two or three articles on the same subject, closed the book, and went on to speculate on the advisability of seeking a post on a periodical of a like nature; wondering whether the burning questions that seemed capable of bearing so many and such different interpretations would, in the end, prove any less wearisome than the love tales, hair-breadth escapes, and semi-scientific articles with which he was accustomed to fill the pages of his magazine.

"Ah, well," he said to himself with a smile when he had thought the matter out, "to stick to the evils one knows is the safest course after all. I should only get into hot water if I meddled with politics. Perhaps it may be interesting to see how other people do my work," he continued languidly, taking up the current number of the Magazine as he spoke, "so here goes for light literature."

The smile faded from his lips the next moment, and there was a catch in his breath, as, glancing over the table of contents, his eye lighted on the title of the last article in the list—"Is it too Late?" It was the very story he had read so carefully and returned to the author. He threw the book from him, annoyed that the thing should thus force itself on his notice. It lay untouched for some minutes, while its victim cursed the ill-luck that kept him helpless as a log, when rapid motion was the only thing to bring him relief. Then almost involuntarily he lifted it from the floor, and once more read the little story to the end.

It had been altered somewhat, he observed, since he had seen it last. It was more concise now—had been cut down, as he phrased it—and the reflections were less bitter in tone. It had been a dreary little production at first, but was tenderly pathetic now, and—for he could not shake off his rôle of critic under any circumstances—showed distinct signs of literary merit.

Manvers gave a deep sigh, and, turning impatiently, gazed out of the window. Groups of people were in the garden below, apparently but just returned from some excursion, for they were talking over their experiences, and their merry laughter reached to his third-floor bedroom, and for a moment drove his thoughts into a pleasanter channel. But only for a moment. Then a voice broke upon his ear that had been unheard by him for many a long day, and he started and turned pale.

Could it be that she was here? When last he had heard of her she was residing in Florence with her parents. But of course the Blakemores, like every one else, were free to roam at will, and, if they chose to spend the autumn months in the cooler air of Switzerland, why not?

He could not see the speaker from his sofa, but presently she crossed the grass, and, accompanied by another girl, stood looking at the surrounding mountains. Yes, it was Helen—whether Helen Blakemore still was a matter he must, in some way, bring his German friend to ascertain.

It would be easy to avoid a meeting, should he wish to do so, for, though he had intended going down the next day, he might alter his mind, and no one would think it strange. One thing must be done, he decided, and that immediately—that wretched magazine must be kept out of the reading-room, where, to a certainty, it would fall into her hands. So, with some difficulty, he edged himself towards the stove, opened the little door, and, forgetting the book did not belong to him, thrust it inside to be cremated at his leisure.

He had hardly done this and resumed his seat when his young friend burst in, and, seating himself without taking any heed of Manvers' preoccupied air, began to dilate on the new arrivals.

"The mother and father are most pleasant and friendly," he said, his face all aglow with excitement and the exertion of his morning's climb. "Just the sort of people for a place of this sort—jolly and kind and ready for anything. The daughter is a Spanish-looking beauty with superb eyes—I can't think where she gets them from. They are friends of that fellow Donnithorne—the man with a glass in his eye—he is quite gone on Miss Blakemore. But she keeps him and everybody else at a distance, and no mistake. I haven't had the courage to say a word to her yet, and I'm not a shy man by any means."

Yes, that was Helen all over. How well Manvers knew the look that would come into those dark eyes of hers, if, by any chance, her fellow-travellers showed undue familiarity. He had learned, now, what he wanted to know, and asked no further questions, deeming it better not to claim acquaintance with the Blakemore family unless—which was unlikely—they should desire it.

At night, as he lay sleepless, he debated with himself as to his course of action. With the pathetic appeal of that little story ringing

in his ears, his heart was very tender towards his old love. Was it too late? One word would make such a difference in the happiness of two lives, and could he let that word go unspoken? No, a thousand times no. Still pride fought hard. With all his unspeakable longing to touch once more the hand of the girl he loved, he could not forget that if an advance were to be made, it was, in all right and reason, her place to make it. But his better self conquered at last, and when morning dawned, he had come to the conclusion to put to the test the lesson so strangely forced on him.

So the magazine was not cremated, but laid carefully on the reading-room table, and Manvers, screened from observation by a thick curtain, lay on a sofa in the recessed window of the ante-room, and waited to see what would happen. Truly a tantalising occupation, for young girls came in and out, but never the one he was yearning for, and at last some one took up the volume, from which he had hoped so much, and carried it away.

He could not remain below more than an hour or two this first day, for long confinement had told on him and left him weak and nervous—too weak, he feared, to enable him, did she appear after all, to bear himself in her presence as a man should. So, when the magazine was gone, he called a waiter, and, with the man's help, hobbled up the stairs to his own room.

The next day found him again at his post. He just had time to see that the magazine had been replaced on the table, when voices outside warned him to retire. The intruders proved to be Mr. and Mrs. Blakemore, and Mr. Donnithorne. Manvers felt rather like an eavesdropper as he involuntarily overheard their conversation, but if he did play such a part, the knowledge thus acquired brought him nothing but anxiety. Apparently those three were on very intimate terms—so intimate, that Manvers was fain to conclude a nearer connection was imminent. Only the recollection of young Müller's words—that Miss Blakemore treated Mr. Donnithorne with marked coldness—kept him from taking flight then and there and giving up the battle.

The morning had been stormy and dark, but after two o'clock the sky cleared, and one by one visitors tripped past the ante-room window, eager to enjoy the fresh air. Mr. Donnithorne sallied forth, a guide at his heels. Mr. and Mrs. Blakemore strolled along, followed by Müller and half-a-dozen others, though not, as the watcher was quick to observe, by their daughter. At last Manvers had reason to believe that, with the exception of Miss Blakemore, every inmate of the hotel had left the place—a conviction that made his pulse beat hurriedly when, a little later, a light step became audible in the corridor.

It was Helen. From his retreat Manvers saw her enter, glance round hastily and, apparently under the belief the room was untenanted, open the piano and begin to play.

In five minutes she was so much absorbed in the music that he was able, without fear of detection, to change his position and take up one that allowed him to see her plainly as she sat at the instrument. His eyes dwelt lovingly on every line of her beautiful, calm face. How different was her expression now to when he had parted from her! When, with scorn in her voice and an angry gleam in her eyes, she had bidden him go and never attempt to see or speak to her again. He had loved her then—ah, never more truly—and he loved her now with a passionate longing that was more akin to pain than to pleasure.

The sonata came to an end, and after a short pause, she began to sing. Of old it had ever been difficult to persuade Helen to sing before any one—even her lover had rarely heard her voice. Music and poetry affected her powerfully, and she shrank from making a display of her feelings. The air she sung now was unfamiliar to him, but the words, Goethe's "*Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt, weiss was ich leide,*" he knew well. They might or might not be an index to the state of the girl's heart, but they evidently touched her, for presently with something very like a sob, she ceased singing and left the music-stool.

She crossed the room and, bending over the large table, sought among the books and papers for something to read. Manvers held his breath as he saw her, after pushing aside two or three others, take up the —— Magazine and settle herself comfortably in an easy-chair. Turning the leaves carelessly, she fixed on an article towards the end of the book—perilously near to it, Manvers thought, remembering that "*Is it too late?*" was the very last paper in the number.

And surely it was that very article she was reading, for what other would have called up such a deep sigh, or filled those sweet eyes with tears. It was wrong, it was unmanly thus to watch her, and her lover, feeling this to his heart's core, had risen to ring for some one to help him upstairs, when the reading-room door opened and a lady and gentleman came in.

Their entrance brought matters to a crisis. With a natural disinclination to be found in tears, the girl rose hastily, made her way into the ante-room and closed the door behind her.

When Helen found herself face to face with her discarded lover she stood transfixed. It seemed to her as if her own thoughts had called up the vision. But her quick eyes soon noted a change in his appearance: how he was ill and worn, his hair grizzled and thin, his step halting and uncertain; and she saw it was the living man that stood before her. She tried to give him some commonplace greeting, but the words would not come. His Christian name, softly breathed, was all she could bring her tongue to utter.

He heard the word and it gave him courage.

"I have startled you, I fear," he began hesitatingly. "Then you did not know I was here?"

"No," she replied, and then paused.

"I have been laid up for weeks with a sprained ankle," he went on slowly. "I only left my room yesterday. I can hardly move now without assistance, which must plead my excuse, Miss Blakemore, for my having remained to listen to your music just now. I have not forgotten your dislike to sing before a stranger."

"A stranger." Did she repeat the word, or was it his fancy? She shivered as if a cold wind had passed over her, and her book fell from her hand.

He glanced at it. Ah, if that poor little story was ever to do a good work in this world, the time had surely come now.

"A stranger," he resumed in a tone of deep feeling, "by your wish, Helen—not mine. Dearest, my heart has never changed towards you and it never will. Is it too late to make up our quarrel? to confess that we were both in the wrong? I have bitterly repented the hard words I said to you. And you know now—you have known for many months—that the tale I told you that night was true. Can you not forgive me and let us be friends? Friends at least, if we can be nothing more."

"I do not deserve even that," she said sorrowfully, as she took his outstretched hand in both her own. "Gregory, my own dear love, I have nothing to forgive. I did you a great wrong, and should have acknowledged it long ago. Oh, I see my conduct in such a different light to-day. Indeed, it is I who should seek forgiveness from you."

"There is no need," he whispered joyfully, as he drew her towards him and kissed her glowing cheek. "There is no need, my darling. Helen, I love you so dearly, I am content to take you as you are and wish for nothing more. I thank God with my whole heart for the happy chance that has brought us together."

Again some one opened the door and Helen fled precipitately, leaving the —— Magazine at her lover's feet. He picked it up and arranged its leaves carefully, gratefully, for he knew it was to the tender pleading of that little story that he owed his present happiness.



THE SELAMLIK.

ONCE a week the Sultan goes to Mosque in state. He does not always go to the same mosque ; it is thought convenient to leave his movements in a little wholesome uncertainty, but the choice is allowed to be known on the morning of each Friday, and foreigners who can get a card from their Ambassador, are permitted to behold (from the little kiosk opposite the Hamidieh Mosque) the progress of the Commander of the Faithful.

Sometimes, statecraft is carried so far as to make delusive preparations along a route which the Father of his people does *not* intend to take. The Hamidieh Jami is the mosque usually selected—it is but just outside the gates of the Yildiz Palace—and when this is the case, the strangers enjoy a full view of the spectacle. If a more distant mosque is selected, they must content themselves with seeing the Sultan pass by. We were fortunate enough to light upon a Friday when the Hamidieh was chosen.

The Yildiz Palace is beyond Pera, on the heights of Cheragan, and its grounds are connected by a bridge with those of Yildiz. It was at Cheragan that poor Abdul Aziz (or *As-was*, as Mr. *Punch* called him) found the pair of scissors, and cut the Gordian knot withal.

The grounds of Yildiz are beautiful—a great park, walled in, and guarded by Osman Digna and his men. And here the Sultan spends his days, and never goes out of the gates, except on Fridays to the Mosque, and to hold the Bairam receptions, and pay his customary visit to Santa Sophia, and the Seraglio. The park is well-guarded, but yet I doubt not the ghost of Abdul Aziz finds entrance there, and sometimes meets with his successor, and reminds him that kings are mortal ! It is a kind of splendid imprisonment, but it is splendid. There are pavilions and kiosks ; the hareem is in the midst of the flower-garden ; there are lakes, and a theatre. The cage is gilded.

The visitors find themselves in a long room with windows, and exactly opposite is the Mosque—white, and glistening, and new. Abdul Hamid built it ; perhaps he thought the shorter the way to church the better—in bad weather.

Our credentials are closely examined—our tickets are not a mere formality. We have not been allowed to bring either umbrellas or opera glasses. Even after we have been admitted, and have taken up our station at our respective windows, there enters to us an officer in full-dress uniform, who calls for the admission cards, and verifies them one by one. And when he chances to upset a drawerful of them in the table he is standing at, quite a new kind of thrill runs through us.

Outside, the soldiers are marshalling. We have passed many regiments on our way. A little below, in an open space beside the Pera-Buyukdereh road, a troop of lancers is being drawn up; their grey uniforms and scarlet pennons make a fine background to the gathering crowd, among which is a considerable number of white-veiled women. Higher up the road which leads to the Palace gate, we can see the Palace gardens, and more soldiers marching under the trees. We hear a strain of martial music, and another regiment comes up, and is posted immediately below us. These are Turkish soldiers—young men—mostly little more than great, sturdy boys, short and thickset, with remarkably heavy jaws, and lowering brows—faces which at this moment seem only dull and stupid, but which could easily express brutal ferocity. They are not good faces, and a very little would make them very bad faces.

The music is sometimes European—a recent fancy of the Sultan—but oftenest it is the wild Turkish music, full of strange, discordant half-intervals; to our ears, no music at all, but a wild, disjointed clangour, the most agreeable sounds being those produced by the jangling of a many-branched instrument, like a candelabrum with bells.

And now comes another company of small, slight men, very young; these also in a distinctly Eastern garb, with green turbans; as we watch their loose, rapid march, they remind us of fierce wild creatures—cat o' mountains, and the like, whereof we read in our Robinson Crusoe days. They are the famous Zouaves from Tripoli, the most terrible of all Turkish fighting men, and those green turbans are to be their shrouds.

With lithe, cat-like step, the Zouaves pass on up the steep bit of road which lies between us and the Palace gate. And after them come more and more; more soldiers, more officers, more Pashas, in gorgeous uniforms, with stars and orders, some on horseback, some in carriages; but almost all go on foot as soon as they reach the mosque gate. There is soon a line of horses all across the road. And such horses! Exquisite creatures, clean-limbed, fiery, yet gentle. Many are milk-white, and their coats glisten like satin, and their splendid harness glitters like gold. An official is taking away all knives and weapons from the people in the crowd, and carrying them all, as it seems, into the Mosque.

All this while, and ever since we came, men with donkey-carts have been throwing down gravel, and raking it smooth; and inside the mosque enclosure they have been cleaning the steps up which the Sultan is to go. A number of venerable persons in Eastern attire, mostly with green or white turbans, have been streaming into the mosque; they are the Imâms, going to assist in the ceremonial.

And now we notice an increased attention in the crowd, and we see an officer walking alone before a carriage, in which there are ladies very closely veiled. All we can see of them are hideous blue and pink satin skirts, and flowing veils of silver tissue. Beside each

carriage—for there are two or three—walks a tall, sinuous person, in a long black coat of some thin stuff. They are not of Turkish race—our imagination, fed on the 'Arabian Nights,' concludes them to be Ethiopians. The ladies are the Sultan's daughters.

The gates of the enclosure are flung wide open, and the carriages pass in, but draw up at the side, and after some conference between the obsequious functionaries and the ladies, the horses are taken out, and the carriages are left standing with the ladies still inside, for it appears they do not enter the mosque. This gives us a slight shock. Of a certainty, Asia has come over into Europe.

By this time, there is a small army posted in and about the road; and now what seems a body-guard of about a score of very tall, fair men, is marched into the enclosure, and stands close by the little stair. The Sultan is late. The clock of the mosque has struck five (Turkish time). It is noon.

In the bright sunshine, after a rainy morning, the spectacle is splendid everywhere. There are the brilliant Turkish uniforms, and glancing swords and head-pieces, and pawing horses. There is a whole galaxy of stars, and within the enclosure there is now a dense line three deep of Pashas, palace-officials, and a few Imâms, who have remained outside. And now, after one or two false alarms, the Sultan comes.

It is a short procession—only two or three carriages, full of gorgeous persons—and then the Padishah, in his state buggy. He wears a decidedly shabby, long, fur-trimmed coat, and a fez, in which is a jewel. Opposite to him sits Osman Digna—it is whispered, *restored* to favour.

Our first thought is that the Sultan is very much like his portraits, our next, that here is the Sick Man. The appropriateness of the phrase strikes us with irresistible force. Never, I think, did I see so melancholy and hopeless a countenance. Perhaps it is the splendid monotony of the Yildiz gardens; perhaps it is the Armenian Question; perhaps he has caught this air of sickliness and decay from the decay of his empire. But I would rather sweep a crossing than be Sultan of Turkey. Never saw I a crossing-sweeper who looked so unutterably miserable.

As he approaches the mosque gates, an officer gives the word, and all those sturdy, thickset boy-soldiers shout together, in a brief, toneless shout, with no ring in it, the most mechanical sound I ever heard proceed from living lips. The Sultan acknowledges it by a very slight gesture, then the carriage drives in, the soldiers turn that way, and shout again, the royal carriage passes the line of bowing courtiers (they look like a row of poppies, bending in the wind), and alights close to the little stairway which leads up to the mosque. It is at one corner, there is no grand entrance, and he goes up the stair alone, and leaves all his guards standing there. His tall, frail figure is strangely unsuggestive of sovereignty.

As he goes up, how much alone he seems ! Is he well-assured, we wonder, of finding only friends within ? The short passage up those steps oddly suggests that other passage which we must all make alone, no matter how many may be assembled to see us go. What was but a grand and showy military display suddenly becomes an image of life and death, as the tall, feeble figure lays its hand on the door, and passes into the mysterious interior of the mosque.

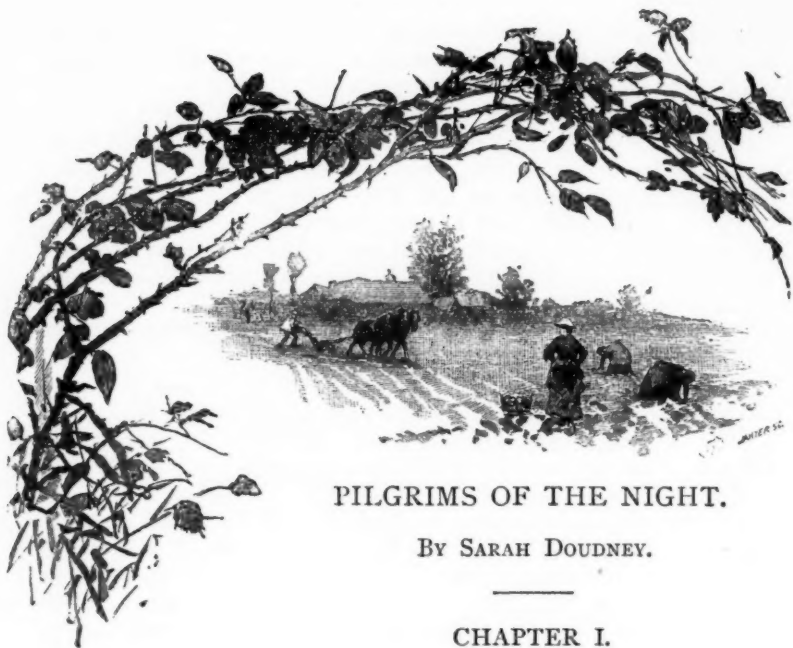
The stair leads into a sort of lobby, with glass windows and doors. Here he disappears ; he is gone to offer up his prayers as successor of the Prophet, and spiritual, as well as temporal head of Islam. He is the Khalif, as well as the Padishah.

Then there is silence. A nice little boy, the Sultan's favourite son, mounts a pretty pony—a little toy-officer on a toy horse. A messenger rides off with much ado, making his way through the hedge of guards and saddle-horses. Some of the court officials have gone in after the Sultan—at another and a wider door ; but most of them remain without. An attendant hastily sweeps and washes the sacred stair, against the Sultan's return.

We wait half-an-hour and more. Then the crowd of turbans begin to stream out from the other door, the lancers move off, the disposition of the troops is changed. The Sultan comes out, but this time he gets into his private buggy, and drives himself, in which action some have seen a proof that his vitality is unimpaired by much pacing up and down in the rose-scented air of the Yildiz gardens. Two minutes take him back to his palace-gates. His weekly outing is over.

MARY A. M. MARKS.





PILGRIMS OF THE NIGHT.

BY SARAH DOUDNEY.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE MEADOWS.

THE silent meadows stretched far away to the sunset; here and there a thin white mist was creeping up from the marshy places, and scarcely a whisper of wind stole over the short grass. No cattle were to be seen on these green levels; one solitary shed stood out black against the crimson gloom of the west, but not a single human habitation was in sight. The stillness was intense; it was an evening to expect or fear in, and a man and woman, walking slowly side by side, seemed to feel that the hour was ominous of sorrow.

"I suppose you wouldn't mind giving me up, would you, *Dulcie*?" said *Bennet Daughton* in a hesitating tone.

A quiver ran through the young woman's frame, and her face turned suddenly pale; every word in that brief sentence of his had fallen on her heart like a drop of molten lead, but she bore the anguish bravely. He glanced at her and saw that she was fighting hard to keep back a sob of pain.

"I'm sorry to have hurt you," he said with clumsy kindness.

"Oh, *Bennet*, don't speak of it again!" she wailed, breaking down all at once. "Never speak of leaving me lonely—oh, how lonely!"

"Life isn't all a love-affair, you know," he said with an impatient sigh. "Most people are fools at some time or other, but they see their folly, and make up their minds to get over it. As to our folly,

Dulcie, I know it was quite as much my fault as yours. We've gone on and on, like a couple of children, never asking ourselves what the end would be!"

He was speaking for himself alone. Dulcie Goss was far too true a woman never to have looked beyond the day. There was much good in her, and she was in reality far above the humble sphere in which she had been born. She had all a woman's yearning for a settled resting-place, all that pathetic far-sightedness which belongs to a deep heart. In her happiest hours she had always dreaded a moment like this; the fear of change had rested like a shadow upon her Eden. She had seen a vision of bare boughs and grey skies while she sat among the roses, and heard the moan of November while the June leafage rustled over her head.

"You *did* love me, Bennet?" she said in a low voice.

"Of course I did, dear. But you know a man lives for other things besides love. I'm not rich enough to marry a girl in your position and educate her up to my level. A duke or a millionaire might do that sort of thing successfully, but not a poor beggar like me. Forgive me for speaking plainly, Dulcie; it's best for us both to see our true position."

"I wish you had seen it sooner," she sighed.

"Well, dear, we were both blind. And after all, is much harm done? We have spent a good many pleasant hours together, and we shall always remember each other kindly. An affair of this sort can only end in a farewell."

The crimson flush was growing duller in the west, and now the first sigh of the night wind crept over the dim levels, briny with the breath of the sea. It hurt him to know that she was grieving, and he was amazed at the intensity of a sorrow which he could not share. Her silence moved him more than her wildest words could have done.

"Don't fret, Dulcie," he said, putting his arm round her and drawing her closer to his side. "If I pain you now, forgive me for the sake of the old bright days. You will say good-bye kindly to me, won't you?"

Suddenly she wrenched herself from his arms, and stood upright, confronting him with a look of scorn which gave her face a new expression. She had been a quiet girl always, soft in her speech and ways, and a little slow in her movements; but now her cheeks were white with passion, and there shot from her brown eyes a gleam of fire.

"Oh," she said, "can this be really you? It's not the man I loved and trusted in; it's an evil thing that's taken your shape, and come to torture me. Don't you know that it will kill me to think of those old bright days by-and-by? Don't you know that you are making me hate you? I wish that one of us had died! It's an old wish, I daresay; and this is an old scene that's being acted a thousand times

by wretched women and heartless men. Only I didn't think *we* should ever be the actors, Bennet! I couldn't believe that such a scene was for the like of us! and even now I feel——"

Her voice died away in silent tears. After all, what availed this strong protest when her position was so weak? He had ceased to love her; all the joy had gone out of her life. The future would be one long lament for the past.

The August twilight was darkening slowly. In a little while their faces would become indistinct to each other; but he stood motionless, looking at her with troubled eyes. To do him justice he had not known that their parting would be as bitter as this. In an idle hour he had kindled a flame which scorched him with its fervent heat.

"Dulcie, I'm sorry," he said at last. "If there's anything that I can do to comfort you——"

She interrupted him with a passionate gesture.

"Don't speak of comfort," she cried. "There's no such word for me. Comfort might come to some other girl as hasn't loved so much."

Poor Dulcie's slip in grammar only served to convince her lover that he was really tired of her. How readily he would have excused it once! He wanted now to get it all over, and say good-bye instead of lingering here in the dusk, and uttering useless words. It was like unwinding silk from a reel, the sooner it was done the better; you knew that you had to come to the bare wood at the inevitable end.

It was probably the last talk they would ever have together, and they could scarcely have chosen a more desolate spot for the scene of their parting. Unconsciously they had moved, as they talked, a little nearer to the thatched shed which stood in a corner of the field. There were no trees near; the hedges were low and scanty; the shed with its broken walls and half-decayed roof was the only shelter which could have hidden a possible listener. They had never once thought that anyone might have been concealed there; a dozen times they had rambled through these deserted fields together in happier days, and had not met with the slightest interruption.

When a man's figure suddenly emerged from the interior of the hut, even Bennet could not suppress a start of surprise. Dulcie, whose last words had been spoken in a voice unusually loud, became silent and alert in an instant. Her quick eyes recognised the intruder at the first glance, and she nerved herself for anything that was to come.

He was a tall man, big, loose-jointed, with a slovenliness of aspect on which he seemed to pride himself. With a swaggering gait and a flushed face, he came towards the discomfited pair, and planted himself right in their path.

"What's the matter, Dulcie?" he began, with a chuckle of unequivocal satisfaction. "He's thrown you over, hasn't he? Ha,

that's just what I've been expecting him to do! Never mind, my dear, let him go! I've waited for you very patiently, Dulcie, and you know well enough I've always had a fancy for you. Let's send him off about his business."

He came close to the girl, nodding his head, and leering at her with an insolent familiarity which brought the colour back to her pale cheeks. She drew a step nearer to her companion.

"Now, Dulcie, don't go in for any airs and graces," he went on. "He doesn't want you, and *I* do. Tell him to be off. What's he fooling about here for? You and I are going to have a quiet little talk, all by ourselves."

He put his heavy hand on her shoulder, but in an instant she had shaken herself free. Her bosom heaved; her brown eyes shone with an angry light.

"Go away, Mr. Eversfield," she cried indignantly. "Mind your own business. You shan't meddle with my affairs!"

"Oh, shan't I?" said the bully with a vicious smile. "Don't be a fool, Dulcie. I always get my own way in the long run. You won't stand in your own light, Dulcie."

"Be off, Eversfield, you are not yourself," said Bennet, speaking with cold contempt. "Get out of our path, I say!"

The cool tone seemed to rouse the big fellow to fury. He came nearer, shaking a heavy fist close to Bennet's face.

"I won't budge for you," he roared with an oath. "Get out yourself, and leave Dulcie to me. She was always a sight too good for the likes of you! And you haven't got as much as would keep her in ribbons, for all you think yourself so much above her."

There was an ominous flash from Bennet's blue eyes. He struck out, all at once, suddenly and sharply. The giant received a blow on the side of the head which staggered him.

Then followed a swift interchange of blows, which left Bennet's face untouched, although he did not escape damage. The heavy fist, crashing down upon his left shoulder, nearly felled him to the ground. He sickened and reeled, and Eversfield saw his advantage.

How the fight would have ended if no third person had been present, will never be known. It was Dulcie who decided the issue.

She was no ethereal drawing-room girl, but a strong young amazon, accustomed to bring her muscles into play; and when Eversfield was about to strike again, she suddenly flung herself upon him, and forced him a step backward. For a moment he struggled with her, but it was a struggle which could not last long. Presently he put out all his brute force, and hurled her suddenly and violently from him. Bennet sprang upon his adversary in a moment. Afterwards, he distinctly remembered that he struck before Eversfield had time to put himself in an attitude of defence.

He struck him just as he was recovering from the effort he had made in flinging Dulcie away. He used his right hand (the left had

been half paralysed by the damage done to his shoulder), and rage and pain lent their combined forces to the blow. His temper had always been of that kind which is roused with difficulty, and then breaks out into ungovernable fury, and there came to him, in that desolate field, one of those rare moments of excitement which change the whole course of a life-time.

When he struck, he was not fully conscious of his own strength ; he was seized with a furious desire to hit hard, and that was all. As Eversfield swung round after hurling Dulcie away, Bennet's blow caught him on the side of his big head, just behind the ear ; and he dropped, with a heavy thud, on the ground.

For an instant no one moved, no one spoke. Bennet was waiting for his antagonist to get up, and begin again ; Dulcie came to Daughton's side as he stood looking down upon his prostrate enemy.

"He doesn't stir," she said after a pause. "Is he shamming? If he isn't shamming, Bennet, I do believe you've hurt him badly."

"He's very quiet." There was a faint ring of uneasiness in Bennet's tone. "He *is* shamming, I think. Don't touch him, Dulcie. Take care !"

She gave no heed to this caution. Stooping down, she began to loosen Eversfield's neck-tie, and unfasten his collar ; but he made no sign of life. Then she sank on her knees by his side, and tried, with all her simple skill, to bring him back to consciousness. Her efforts were in vain ; and the dusk was deepening every moment. The last faint flush of red was fading out of the west ; the breath of evening blew coldly on her face.

"I must go home," she said, looking up at her lover with anxious eyes. "But I don't like to leave him here. It's strange that he doesn't move, isn't it? Oh, Bennet, he's *quite* still ; he isn't breathing !"

The awful truth broke upon them both at the same moment. There was nothing more that could be done for William Eversfield. He would never get up to fight anybody again. He was dead.

The unhappy young man who had given him his death-blow, stood there in the stillness like one turned into stone. At that moment he would have parted with his life gladly, if he could but have called back the spirit which had fled.

But there was nothing to be done. All the skill in the world could never recall that invisible thing which had just gone away. The utter uselessness of any effort, the futility of the most intense anguish, overpowered him completely. Why did that poor fool come out this evening, and begin a senseless quarrel? Why had not Bennet and Dulcie separated just one half-hour earlier? Oh, this never-ending Why !

He groaned aloud in his agony, and the sound went straight to Dulcie's heart. Sorely wounded, and desperately troubled as it was, that heart of hers was faithful still. She had been kneeling by the

side of the dead, but now she rose swiftly, and took Bennet's hands in her own. They were deadly cold, so cold that she shuddered as she held them in her firm clasp.

"It's all over," she said solemnly, "and now you have to think only of yourself."

He was not prepared for the extreme calm of voice and manner which marked these words. There was an indescribable look of power and tenderness in the pale face which confronted his.

"Of myself?" he repeated in a dull tone. "I've killed him, haven't I? I suppose I've got to go and give myself up to justice."

"No," she said, still holding his hands. "You didn't mean to kill him. His blood be upon his own head; he brought his death upon himself. God only knows what I'd give to bring him back to life; but that can't be done. What good would it do, Bennet, if you gave yourself up to justice?"

"I should be punished, of course. It would be penal servitude, I daresay; if not, hanging. You see, I hit him first, and I ought to be punished," he said a little mildly.

"My poor love!" There was a world of pity in her rich voice. "No punishment can be so heavy as the torture of your own heart. Let me guide you, dear; you're stunned now; you don't know yourself, and can't tell what you really think. We must hurry away at once from this place and go to our homes."

"I can't do it, Dulcie; I can't leave him there!"

"Oh, Bennet, it isn't *him*! The real *him* may be wanting you to get away and be safe; who can tell? If you stay here a minute longer you may be caught."

"I ought to be caught. Didn't I kill him?" said the poor fellow, going stupidly over the old ground again.

"It's fairer to say that he killed himself," she said firmly. "He'd have been alive now if he'd only let us alone. You're no murderer; you didn't strike him till he shook his fist in your face."

"There is no one but you to say how far he provoked me, Dulcie. And I don't suppose that anyone would believe your evidence in my defence. They would think that you would say anything to save me."

"They'd think right," she said. "I would."

There was a brief pause. The night was coming on; the wind blew colder from the sea. When she spoke again her hands closed tightly over his, and her face grew sharp and drawn with intense anxiety.

"My dear," she said, "I won't ask you to think of me or care for any pain of mine, but I do ask you to think of your old father—the dear, proud old man—and the beautiful sister who's so good to you! For the sake of them, let's cover up this awful thing and hide it if we can. Come, dear; there's not a living creature to be seen—come away."

Like one in a dream he did her bidding, yielding to the spell of her earnest entreaty, and in silence those two went swiftly across the

misty fields, through winding paths which led them out into a quiet road. The land was wrapped in the veil of twilight; the air was damp, and there was a faint odour of the sea. They did not talk as they walked; each soul was going its own way in the stillness.

At a little wicket, set in a high hedge, Bennet came to a stop at last. Still in silence, and with merely a glance, he parted with his companion, and she walked on sadly through the gloom alone.

The instinct of self-preservation, stunned at first by the shock of a great remorse, had reasserted itself in Bennet Daughton's mind as he turned his steps homeward. He was young, he had spent only two-and-twenty years in the world, and had found it, on the whole, a fairly pleasant place. The blow which had felled William Eversfield to the earth had struck at the very root of his own existence; never more could life be all that it had once been to him. In slaying Eversfield, he had slain the joy of his own youth and manhood; and yet this life of his, blighted and embittered as it had suddenly become, was still a thing that must be guarded and cherished.

The very sight of the little gate quickened his desire to go on living. It was the entrance to that quiet home-life, which was full of sacred memories. Often and often he had seen his mother standing here to watch for the coming of her boy; and as a vision of her face and figure rose up before him, the young fellow could hardly repress a groan. Things had not been going well with him since she died. He had missed the spell of her quiet influence—missed it more than anyone had ever known.

The little gate opened without noise, and he walked softly along a flagged path leading through a small shrubbery to the house.

The daylight was gone, but a warm glow was streaming through the lozenge panes of a latticed window wreathed thickly with ivy, and Bennet could see all within. He stood still and looked into a long, low room with rows of bookshelves, a corner cupboard with glass doors, a well-worn sofa and two easy-chairs, one on each side of the hearth. He saw that both these chairs were vacant, and there was only one person in the room.

A young woman, slight and graceful, was sitting alone at the table reading by a shaded lamp. Her fair, grave face, remarkably pure in outline, came just within the circle of light, and as she bent over the book she looked thoughtful almost to severity. She had just come in from the garden, where she had paced the paths in the calm still night, and she had not removed the lace covering she had thrown over her head. She did not move, but sat as still as a beautiful statue, and the room was so hushed that the unseen watcher could hear the old clock ticking in its corner. The picture was so warm in its colouring, and so lovely with its home-like associations, that in looking at it Bennet almost forgot his own wretched position. But in an instant it returned with a quick stab of intolerable anguish.



"SHE DID NOT MOVE, BUT SAT STILL AS A BEAUTIFUL STATUE."

He might have startled the girl if he had tapped at the window. A moment's reflection convinced him that it was best to go gently to the door and move the latch.

To the last day of his life he could never forget his thrill of surprise when the latch yielded to his touch. On this evening, of all evenings, Abigail had forgotten to turn the key in the lock. She, the most faithful and orderly of servants, who had lived with the Daughtons for more than twenty years, had failed in her commonest duty for the first time to-night.

He opened the door noiselessly, closed it again, and entered the sitting-room with so quiet a step that the reader did not lift her eyes from the book.

"Has the Major gone to sleep, Abby?" she asked, in a sweet, dreamy voice.

"Joscelyne," said Bennet, in a whisper at her side.

She started, and gave a little, quick gasp.

"Why, how——" she was beginning; but he silenced her with a quick gesture.

"Hush," he whispered. "I don't want them to know when I came in. Is Abby upstairs with my father?"

"Yes," she said, looking up at him with frightened eyes. "She has not come down since you went out. There is no fire in the kitchen this evening: Emma has gone home for a holiday, you know. What is the matter, Bennet? There was nothing wrong when you left me, was there?"

"Not then. Something has just happened."

"Something dreadful?" she asked, shuddering. "Oh, Bennet, you look so white—so old!"

"I shall always be old now. Yes, Joscelyne, something dreadful has happened, and no one must know it but you."

She put one slender white hand upon her heart, and tried to calm herself; but the colour was all gone from her lips and cheeks, and her long, dark eyes, heavily fringed by black lashes, shone out strangely. At that moment there was something almost startling in the singularity of her beauty.

"Is it—has anyone at the vicarage——?"

"No, no; they are all right at the vicarage. Hush! I shall sit down here with a book. Abby won't know that I've been out at all."

When the old servant came in, she found the brother and sister reading diligently in profound silence. Bennet, in a familiar attitude, with his elbows on the table and his head resting on his hands, looked as if he had not stirred for an hour at least. He did not even lift his eyes.

"You might have gone out, Mr. Bennet," she said. "The Major hasn't needed anything. He's fallen asleep as quiet as a lamb."

"But when an old man is ill one never knows what may happen, Abby."

"Very true, sir. But the Major's mending fast. He isn't going to leave us just yet. Now, Miss Joscelyne, do please give up reading; you've tried your eyes long enough."

"What a couple of bookworms we are!" said Bennet, getting up, and collecting all the volumes scattered over the table. "So Emma has gone out for the day, Abby? and all the work falls to you?"

"Well, sir, my hands are strong enough to do it. But when I was a girl I wasn't always wanting to run home to my friends. Nothing will ever make a woman of Emma; she'll be a baby to the end of her days. Miss Joscelyne, how white you look!"

"Perhaps I have been reading too long," the girl forced herself to say. "Never mind, Abby; I'll give myself a beautiful rest."

She did not venture to speak to her brother till Abigail had gone upstairs again. The Daughtons were not rich, and their habits were very simple. After an eight o'clock supper they usually chatted by the fire in winter, or strolled about in the long garden in summer. They had always found a great deal to say to each other: and of late certain new experiences had drawn them unconsciously nearer together.

In the midst of his bitter trouble and anxiety, Bennet was feeling that he could safely turn to Joscelyne for sympathy. There were many things that he had not told her (there are always things which a brother does not tell a sister), but he had never thought of hiding this thing.

"Joscelyne," he said, meeting the gaze of her anxious eyes, "I went out this evening to see Dulcie Goss; and while I was with her in the fields, William Eversfield came suddenly upon us. He had been drinking, and he insulted me. I struck him—we fought—and—he is dead."

"Bennet!" she gasped, "Bennet! Did you kill him?"

His eyes did not leave hers for an instant. He bent his head with a significance whose meaning she could not doubt; and then she caught his arm and clung to it with a little inarticulate cry.

"Are you in danger?" she whispered. "Did any one see? Does any one know?"

He struggled to bring out his words, and his face was so worn and haggard that it wrung her heart to see him.

"Only Dulcie saw," he said. "Only Dulcie knows."

"Oh," she moaned, sinking down into a chair, and shaking like a leaf. "Then there is no hope of concealment! You are in the power of that low girl! This is ruin indeed!"

For a few seconds there was utter silence. The hands of the clock pointed to half-past ten. He stood looking down at her with misery in his gaze. What comfort had he to give her?

"Dulcie is not quite as bad as you think her," he said at last.

A flush of anger swept across the fair, white face.

"She is a low girl, Bennet! If you had not run after her, this

horrible trouble would never have come upon us," she said with passionate disdain.

"She is not a lady," he acknowledged. "But she has good points."

"Everybody has good points. Oh, Bennet, what is to be done? Are you quite sure that no one else saw the fight?"

"As sure as one can possibly be, Joscelyne. It was awful to come away and leave him lying there. I should not have done it if Dulcie had not pleaded with me, and even now I feel as if I ought to go and tell the whole world."

The set, miserable expression of his face startled her, and she bent towards him with clasped hands.

"Oh, no!" she cried faintly. "Oh, I don't think it was a crime! It was an accident—a dreadful accident. And your life will never be the same as it was before this happened. You deserve some sort of punishment, I suppose; but you will suffer more than enough."

"Yes, I shall suffer," he muttered with a groan. "That was what Dulcie said. Good heavens! How shall I bear to-morrow?"

All at once his false calmness seemed to give way; the strain was too great to be borne any longer. His head sank upon his hands, his whole frame was shaken with sobs; he writhed as one in mortal anguish.

In an instant Joscelyne was on her knees by his side, her arms were round him; her voice was murmuring words of tenderness and comfort. As she clung to him, her slight frame swayed by the storm of his misery, she felt as if their great grief had cut them off from the rest of the world. It was hard to realise that they were still in the old room where they had played as children. Here, on this very hearth, they had knelt at their mother's knee to say their evening prayer; there, on the wall, hung the photograph of her sweet face, looking down upon them both with its calm smile.

When his anguish had spent itself a little, and he sank back, white and shivering, in the chair, she ventured to loose her hold. Then she brought wine and made him drink it. He was cold, he said—very cold—and when Joscelyne wrapped a railway-rug round his shoulders he did not resist her. The strong, self-willed young man seemed to have become as meek and feeble as a sick child.

They clung together for long weary hours, taking little thought of the flight of time. But, in looking back afterwards on that miserable night, Joscelyne remembered how the colour had slowly returned to Bennet's lips, and his death-cold hands had grown gradually warmer in her clasp. She had saved him from illness—perhaps from loss of reason.

Meanwhile the wind had risen higher and higher, and was moaning round the house and through the long garden. The pair who were clinging together in the lamp-light shuddered at the mournful wailing of its weird voice. They thought of a still figure lying all alone on the damp grass, and pictured its white face touched by the first chill

gleam of the morning. Who would find it lying there? Who would come to tell them of the discovery? How long would it be before it was found?

"I hope," whispered Bennet at last, "I hope they'll soon find him. It will be awful if we have to wait days and days for the news. And how shall we bear it when they tell us? Do you think you can control yourself, Joscelyne?"

"Yes," she answered. "I can bear anything and do anything to keep off exposure. But, oh, Bennet—that girl!"

"Don't worry about her," he said. "She—she is really fond of me, you know."

"There's something tragic in her face," Joscelyne said sadly. "She can love, and she can hate. It frightens me to think that your fate is in her hands."

She drew his head down to hers and kissed him in silence. Then they both rose, and crept noiselessly upstairs to their rooms. The wind burst out with a fresh shriek which wailed through the whole house, and the old clock struck two.

CHAPTER II.

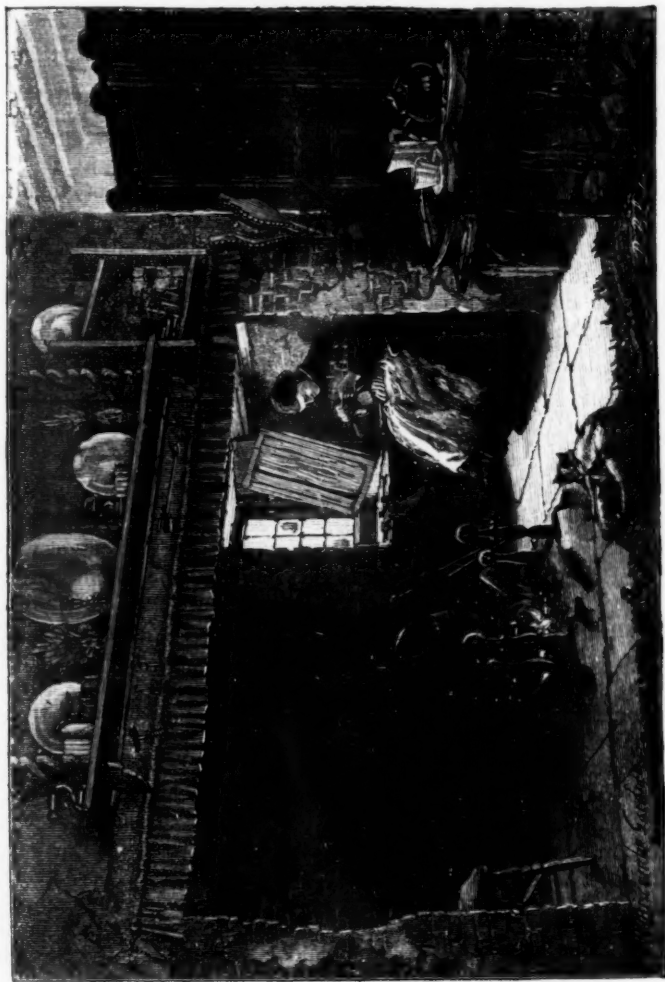
THE NEXT DAY.

DULCIE GOSS lay broad awake, and wondered if the long night would ever come to an end. Again and again she had risen from her bed to look out of the window of her little room; the high wind had blown the mists away, and stars were shining in the soft darkness, but there was no comfort for her in their cold, far-off light. She did not even wish to die, and go to dwell in one of those stars. All her desires clung passionately to the world where Bennet lived. She wanted Bennet—only Bennet—nothing else would satisfy her, either in heaven or on earth.

Simeon Goss was a well-to-do carpenter, with a steady trade, but his wife had fallen into weak health, and Dulcie did the greater part of the housework. Ellen, the younger daughter, was going away in the country, as servant in a farm-house. But Mrs. Goss, being a rheumatic woman, decided to keep her elder girl at home; and, although Dulcie had a good deal of work to do, her mother was indulgent. She could generally take a walk in the evening when the day's labour was at an end. The house stood back from the village. In far-off days it had been a farm-house, and the kitchen was a large old-fashioned room with a great chimney-corner, and iron dogs between which the fire crackled and blazed. Mrs. Goss was very fond of sitting in the old-fashioned window, and there Dulcie had found her on returning from her interview with Bennet. She had

gone straight through to her room, and had not come down again.

Chalkham was a little village, situated on the outskirts of a great naval arsenal; and its long, narrow street swarmed with soldiers and sailors. Neither red-coats nor blue-jackets possessed any attractions



"MRS. GOSS WAS VERY FOND OF SITTING IN THE OLD-FASHIONED WINDOW."

for Dulcie Goss, and she had a quiet way of keeping unwelcome admirers at a distance. But there were long summer evenings when the flat green meadows, lying at the base of the chalk hill, were as sweet as the bowers of fairyland. She had a fancy for lonely walks over these silent levels, and loved to commune with her own heart

and be still. Girls of her own age and standing called her "stuck-up" and shy. The truth was that she was, unconsciously, much above them; above all her surroundings. It was very seldom that she asked any girl-companions to join her in her rambles; their chatter wearied her; she found their vanity distasteful. Sometimes, when her father and mother had remonstrated with her on this exclusiveness she had answered them in few words, and continued to tread her path alone.

She lay awake, watching the stars that glittered in the square of the window, weary of her own unrest. The suffering body may be eased by change of position; but what relief is there for the agonised soul? Dulcie, lying with her face turned towards the window was just as far as ever from repose; but she had proved the utter uselessness of constant tossings, and was trying to bear her misery in stillness.

She thought of an exquisite summer evening last year, when Bennet Daughton had spoken to her for the first time. It was the hour of sunset and dewfall; the air was sweet with grassy perfumes; a thin haze confused all boundary lines, and lent an enchantment to the downs that extended far away to the right. Bennet had met her in the midst of a wide field, walking slowly in solitary enjoyment of the dewy calm; and he had paused, looking intently into her face before he spoke.

"Oh," she sighed, "if I had never met him, never loved him! It's all over now; all over."

But was it all over? The dead body, lying out yonder in the darkness, was a link between two living souls. A ghastly link, it is true, and one which they would fain keep out of sight; but a strong bond, as a secret known only to two persons must always be.

"Perhaps he'll come back to me," she thought. "He won't dare to speak of it to any one else, and he'll long to ease his mind."

She rose up once more, and fell on her knees, a mass of rough brown hair crumpled about her upturned throat, her hands clasped tightly in passionate entreaty to heaven that Bennet might mercifully be spared the worst consequences of his act. Then she went back to bed, and from sheer exhaustion, fell asleep.

In the wet meadows, some cattle-sheds stood out darkly against the pale background of dawn. It was a grey dawn, with rifts of silver broadening slowly above the hills, and a soft, rainy wind. The cocks began to crow; a flock of pigeons went flying over the house-tops; and Mrs. Goss told her husband that it was time to get up. But Dulcie slept on, wrapped in a heavy, dreamless slumber.

"It seemed as if you were never going to wake, child," said her mother, standing at her bedside.

Dulcie lifted her languid head from the pillow, and pushed the thick hair away from her face. The sleep had not done her much good. Her brain was dazed; for a second or two she looked vacantly at Mrs. Goss, scarcely understanding her words. Then, as a

wave of remembrance swept over her, she realised her own position at once. She had a secret to keep, and she must get up and go about her duties as usual.

"I do feel stupid this morning," she admitted cheerfully. "It's the weather, I think. I'll dress and come down, mother."

"Don't hurry yourself if you're not well," said Mrs. Goss, giving her a scrutinising glance.

"I'm quite well, mother. Only a little heavy and tired. It will go off, I daresay."

But when she saw her own reflection in the little looking-glass, her heart sank within her. She had a clear skin with a warm under-tint of brown, usually freshened with healthy roses on the cheeks. But to-day there were no roses; youth and beauty seemed to have faded out of the pale face which confronted her so sadly. The eyes, with dark shadows under them, were full of mute distress.

"They'll see that I've a burden on my mind," she thought. "I'm not used to lying awake at nights. I wasn't made for deceptions and concealments. Perhaps, after all, it would have been best for Bennet to have gone and confessed everything. But no—no—no; *that* would have killed his poor old father and sister. And who can tell what would have been done to him? Oh, that poor wretch lying out there in the field! His life wasn't worth much, and he was always a sore worry to me. Yet, what wouldn't I give to see his ugly red face looking in at our door again! Ah, if it hadn't been for that silly craze for me, Dulcie Goss, he might have been alive now!"

While these thoughts were drifting through her mind, she was moving quickly about the little room. A plunge into cold water freshened the pale face and weary eyes; and when she had given her curly hair a vigorous brushing, she began to look like her old self. She put on a neat, dark, olive gown (her gowns were always neat and well-fitting), pinned her white collar with a silver horse-shoe (her sole love-token from Bennet) and went down the narrow staircase humming a little tune.

Simeon Goss was just finishing his breakfast as his daughter entered the kitchen. So rarely did Dulcie fail in any of her household duties that he looked up at her with anxiety dawning in his eyes. It was from him that Dulcie had got her eyes, with their clear, direct gaze, but few would have taken this rugged, grey-haired man for the girl's father.

"What's amiss with you, Dulcie?" he asked. "Poor mother's been getting up and lighting the fire, and doing things which are not good for her to do."

"She sha'n't have to do them again, father," Dulcie said, in a penitent voice. "I'm truly sorry, I'm sure. 'Twas a strange kind of heaviness that was on me this morning."

"I hope it's not the beginning of sickness," said Simeon, with

another anxious glance. "There's some that always sicken with the fall of the leaf; but you've had your health wonderful, Dulcie. Diphtheery's about again, they say."

"I'm quite well, father," the girl answered, giving herself a slight shake, as if she wanted to wake up completely. "If I felt ill, I'd say so at once. But it isn't wholesome to sleep heavy in the morning, and I'll take a mouthful of fresh air presently just to clear my head. You're not tired, mother, are you?" she added, laying her hand gently on Mrs. Goss's shoulder.

"N-no, not exactly," said the good woman, in a doubtful tone. "But I've got out of the habit of early rising, and I shall never take kindly to it again. Whatever should I do if you was to get married, Dulcie?"

"If so be that Dulcie was to get married," said Simeon, with solemn deliberation, "we'd ask Maria to spare Mary Jane to us. We couldn't expect our Ellen to leave her place, and her got so used to farmhouse ways. No, no—we'd ask for Mary Jane, and she'd come for certain."

"But I'm not going to get married!" cried Dulcie, pouring hot water into the teapot with a hand that shook a little. "What made you think of such a thing, father? Who put it into your head?"

"Your mother started the idea," said Mr. Goss gravely. "It's not altogether a pleasing idea to me, Dulcie, for I don't want to part with my girl. Nevertheless, it's as the Lord wills, and human nature will take its own way."

Simeon Goss put on his cap and opened the door that led into the carpenter's shop. A pleasant odour of fresh shavings and sawdust floated into the kitchen, and Dulcie followed her father with an affectionate glance. Simeon was past sixty, but he was a strong, well-made man, and the burden of his years sat lightly upon him.

"I've never thought," said Mrs. Goss, smiling to herself, "that you were meant to be an old maid. And if so be, as father says, we should have to put up with Mary Jane, why, there's many worse than Mary Jane! But, Dulcie, you do look uncommon pale this morning, and whatever has come to you, I can't think!"

Her smile had faded as she spoke the last words. But her daughter sat sprightly in a moment and patted her on the shoulder.

"Mother, you mustn't worry about my looks," she said. "I'm dying for fresh air; that's all that ails me. As soon as I've washed up and got dinner ready, I'll run out for a bit."

Abigail, a little later than usual, was still the first of Major Daughton's household to greet the new-born day. Emma had promised to return before nine, but Abigail did not put implicit faith in Emma's promises. She had taken her master's tray up-stairs, and had spread the breakfast-table for the others, when there was a sound of voices at the kitchen door. The voices belonged to Emma and her brother Joe, and both were speaking in tones of excitement.

"Oh, so you really are come, Emma?" she said, opening the door. "And how are you this morning, Joe?"

He did not say how he was, but his round face wore a scared look. Emma gave a sort of gasp, and then spoke very fast.

"We came across the fields to look for mushrooms, Abigail—Joe and Bill Wallis and me, and some one was lying on the damp grass asleep, only he wasn't asleep. It was Mr. William Eversfield, lying there dead!"

"Bill Wallis went to the police-station at once, and I came on here with Emma because she was so upset," said Joe, taking his share in the tale. "Everybody knowed he was a wild one. Mr. Bennet knowed him, didn't he?"

"As to Mr. Bennet, he never mixed himself up with fellows like Eversfield," said Abigail with dignity. "He'll be sorry to hear of his death, of course, but our minds have all been on the strain. The Major was so ill yesterday that Mr. Bennet never once left the house all the afternoon and evening. An invalid does give one a deal of work to do," she added, with a glance at Emma.

Joe went his way, disappointed that his news had produced so slight an effect on Abigail's mind. But Abigail, although she had seemed indifferent, was not really unmoved. Knowing that Emma was given to hysterics, she had made as light of the matter as possible, and was determined that the girl should not let her thoughts dwell upon it too long. One keen glance had shown her certain ominous twitchings of Emma's large, rosy mouth. The little maid was still trying valiantly to swallow an immense lump in her throat when Joscelyne came slowly downstairs.

"Oh, miss," began Emma, feeling sure that here was someone who would really be properly shocked and horrified. "Oh, miss, there's an awful thing happened——"

"I know," said Joscelyne, coolly interrupting her. "I heard what you were saying."

She had paused for a moment on the last stair, and stood there looking like a small queen. Her beauty was decidedly of a regal type, and she was one of those distinguished-looking girls of whom one cannot help expecting great things. She looked, as many people said, as if she were born to be the heroine of some remarkable story; and yet the chances were that she would go through life much as other women do, and be just a good wife and mother, although nature had endowed her with the face and bearing of an empress. Every feature in that face was cut with cameo-like clearness. The nose was slightly inclined to be aquiline, the beautiful lips had a faintly scornful curve. As to the complexion, it was transparently fair and pure, but the long dark eyes and dark brows contrasted strangely with masses of pale-gold hair. This hair neither waved nor curled; it was drawn back simply from the low, broad forehead, and coiled in heavy braids round the proud little head.

Joscelyne was always as pale as a white rose, and she showed fewer traces of mental suffering than an apple-blossom beauty would have done. But she looked a little worn, a little weary, and Abigail took alarm in a moment.

"You haven't rested well, dear miss," she said. "Now the Major has had a lovely night. You and Mr. Bennet have been worrying yourselves too much."

"Well, perhaps we have," Joscelyne confessed. "Abby, I'll carry up Mr. Bennet's breakfast. It will do him good to lie still a little longer. I think he has caught a cold."

"No, miss, I can't let you wear yourself out with trays," began Abigail fussily. But her young mistress stopped her at once with quiet firmness.

"You must not thwart me, Abby," she said with a faint smile. "Just get his breakfast. I want to see how he has slept."

Abigail obeyed, but persisted in carrying the tray as far as the door. Then Joscelyne knocked softly, took it out of her hands, and went in.

The change that anguish had wrought in her brother was so striking that she almost started. He was looking fearfully ill. The clear healthy pallor of his skin had changed to sallowness; his blue eyes seemed to have got large and dull. On the bed where he lay the sunlight was shining in, and the room looked cheerful. His favourite books were arranged in orderly rows on the shelves; a desk was open on a table by the window, and a pile of manuscript lay upon it. A guitar stood in one corner; in another a small statuette was standing on a bracket—a dancing-girl, holding a tambourine aloft, and lifting up an arch, delicate face. The face bore some resemblance to Leila Wooledge.

"Any news?" Bennet asked, his lips whitening as he spoke.

"They have found him," she whispered, putting the tray down upon the bed, "but all is safe as yet."

"Who found him?" The words could scarcely be heard.

"Our maid Emma, and her brother Joe, and Bill Wallis. They came across the fields and saw him lying there. Bill Wallis has gone to the police station."

Bennet drew a long breath and closed his eyes for a moment.

"Take those things away, Joscelyne," he said, "I cannot touch them."

"Bennet, dear, you must eat; you must not break down. Does your shoulder still pain you? We will call it rheumatism, remember."

"It's awfully stiff and hurts when I move. Don't let Abigail come and paw me about. You can get some embrocation or something without telling her, can't you?"

"Yes, yes—I can get anything, Bennet! Only drink some coffee and eat a little bit. It won't seem so difficult when you have made a beginning."

Bennet yielded to her as he had yielded to Dulcie, drawn into compliance by the power of womanly affection. She hovered over him tenderly, almost feeding him as she would have fed a child, dropping a word of encouragement now and again until his spirit began to rally at last.

When she went down-stairs, Abigail met her with anxious inquiries. How had Mr. Bennet slept? What was the matter?

"It is a chill," Joscelyne said. "He has had a wakeful night, and complains of a pain in his shoulder. Rheumatism, of course."

"He had better see the doctor, miss."

"Oh, no—he has a perfect horror of doctors! But we'll make him wear his new flannels, Abby, and see that he takes care of himself. My mother was the only person who knew how to manage him," she added, with a sigh.

"I wish you'd let the doctor just look at him," pleaded the old servant, in a coaxing tone. "There's a great deal of sickness going about Chalkham, my dear."

"There always is. I hate Chalkham! No, Abby, you mustn't mention the word 'doctor' in Mr. Bennet's hearing. If you did, he would rage himself into an illness. At present he is not really ill. Do not speak of him to Dr. Herrick when he calls to see the Major."

But this was a command which Abigail promptly disobeyed. She dearly loved a chat with Dr. Herrick, and she told him, with many words, that her young lady and gentleman had both been over-anxious about her master. Mr. Bennet, she thought, was more delicate than his sister, although Miss Daughton was always as pale as a lily. Mr. Bennet had looked peaked all day yesterday, and hadn't stirred beyond the house and garden. He had taken it into his head that his father was going to be worse, and was afraid to go out. The consequence was that he had got a cold through sitting over his books in that hot parlour. What a dreadful end for that poor Mr. Eversfield! Did the doctor know how he had come by his death?

William Eversfield had been killed by a blow; that was all that Dr. Herrick could tell. He had always been a hard drinker, quarrelsome in his cups, but no one seemed to have had a grudge against him. He had been last seen at the *Magpie*—a tavern in Chalkham much frequented by men of his stamp—but it was impossible to say why he had gone to the fields. Of course the most searching inquiries would be made into the matter.

Searching inquiries were made, but without the slightest result. Day succeeded day without throwing any light upon the mystery of Eversfield's death. The poor fellow had few friends and fewer relations. Those connected with him had never loved him well, and had felt ashamed of the loose life that he had led. It was generally believed that he had received his death-blow in a fight with some wandering tramp. Anyhow, the guilty man had got clean

away from the scene of his crime, and had not left the least trace behind.

It was almost a relief to Joscelyne to find that Bennet really had a cold. Abigail was allowed to come into his room and bring him the broth and gruel which his soul abhorred. But Joscelyne alone was acquainted with the secret of the bruised shoulder, and applied the remedies with her own hands. And so the time went on.

A fortnight went by while Bennet's cold kept him indoors. The Major was still confined to his room, and Dr. Herrick came to see him twice a week. It was from the doctor that the Daughtons heard of the new tragedy which was destined to blot out the remembrance of poor Eversfield's untimely end.

On the high road, just out of Chalkham, a young labourer had stabbed his sweetheart and desperately wounded the sailor who was his successful rival. The girl was dead, the sailor was not expected to recover. It was a story which was full of strong romance, and awakened the popular interest as nothing tamer could have done. Lizzie Rill, the victim of her lover's jealousy, had been quite a belle in Chalkham; a pretty, frivolous creature, incapable of comprehending the intense feeling that she had called into play. The women said it was all her fault. The men all admitted that poor Bob had gone too far; but he was a quiet fellow, well liked among them, and they were sorry for him—far more sorry than he was for himself.

Bob had not attempted to run away, nor had he shown the slightest desire to evade justice. He had done for Lizzie, and he didn't want to live any longer. Let them do with him as they would. He was guilty; he was anything that they pleased to call him; he didn't regret his deed. He had borne a great deal from Lizzie; she had played fast and loose with him and ruined his whole life. Well, she wouldn't spoil another chap's life, that was all.

"Poor Eversfield is already forgotten," said Joscelyne. "Oh, Bennet, you would be safe, quite safe, if that girl did not know!"

He was sitting moodily in his own room with the guitar on his knee, striking the chords now and then, and bringing out a faint, fairy-like music which saddened his sister. He had changed terribly she thought, as his eyes met hers. But there was a look of relief in his worn face.

"Bob isn't half such a sneak as I am," he said, after a pause.

"Don't call yourself names. What would have become of us if the truth had been known? I wish Bob had been mixed up with Dulcie Goss instead of Lizzie Rill."

"That's a selfish wish, Joscelyne."

"Of course I don't want either of them harmed! But if a young woman was fated to come to a violent end, it might as well have been Dulcie as Lizzie."

"Dulcie is worth a score of Lizzies!" he cried with sudden heat.

Joscelyne's lip curled.

"I don't associate with Dulcies and Lizzies. One common girl seems to me the same as another."

She sailed out of the room, carrying her queenly little head higher than usual, and he sat and strummed by the fire.

There was a double knock at the hall door, followed by the sound of talking in the sitting-room below. He could hear his sister's clear accents, answered by a pleasant baritone voice. He knew the voice very well, and left off strumming to listen. But when he had been listening for a little while, he put down the guitar suddenly, with a groan.

"Poor Joscelyne," he said. "Poor little Joscelyne!"

It did not seem as if Joscelyne was in need of pity just then. She was serenely happy as she sat in the old-fashioned room; and it was plain that Alban Woledge enjoyed looking at her. He was a young clergyman, scarcely thirty; tall, and slender; an ideal parson. His face riveted one's attention at once. It was a perfect Athenian face, clean-shaven, and all the more statuesque by reason of its clear paleness. He had large, light-blue eyes with golden lashes; his hair, too, was golden, and lay in little ripples over his head. He was a man who never made enemies, and had no close friendships. A blameless life, a polished manner, and a scrupulous performance of all his duties, made him eminently respectable. Every one said, of course, that he was far too good for such a miserable place as Chalkham. But the vicar was an absentee; and Woledge had come to the parish for a time, and had established himself at the vicarage with his sister as his housekeeper.

Leila Woledge thought that her brother would marry somebody with a fortune or a title, and end his days as a bishop, or a dean at least. Very likely this was the path which Alban Woledge had marked out for himself, and he would not have swerved a hair's breadth from his course if Joscelyne Daughton had not chanced to come in his way.

Sometimes he had told himself that his well-considered life must never be disarranged by such a troublesome element as love. Love, with a big L, was a luxury permitted to the lower classes; this was his unexpressed belief. But Joscelyne, with her singular beauty, and her delicate charm of manner and mind, had stirred up in him a sweet turbulence which was astonishing.

"My father and Bennet are both invalids," she was saying. "The household is a prey to horrors. How good of you to come and cheer us up! Why didn't Leila come too?"

The Woledges and Daughtons had been acquainted for six months, and the girls were Leila and Joscelyne to each other.

"She has gone to a sewing-party at Mrs. Dale's. But she never does any sewing," said Woledge, looking deep into the dark eyes, and thinking what wonderful lashes they had. "Leila never sets a stitch if she can help it, and yet her friends all believe that she gets through heaps of work. It is very amusing."

"But she brightens the workers and makes the sewing easy for them," said Joscelyne.

"Why are you a prey to horrors?" he asked suddenly. "One can't possibly associate this dear old house with anything horrible."

She gave a slight shudder which did not escape his notice. He bent over her with an air of tender reproach.

"You are getting nervous," he said gently. "Don't give way to morbid thoughts, they are bad for you."

"I am not morbid often; but these tragedies, coming one after the other—how terrible they are!"

"They are very dreadful; especially poor Bob Millett's crime, because one sees so plainly that he just gave himself up to his own violent passions. But as to the other unfortunate fellow, we can hardly say that he was murdered. The blow which killed him might have been struck in self-defence. He was known to be a great brawler, and he might have hit somebody who hit him again."

"Yes," she said, brightening visibly.

"But you can't prevent these sad things," he went on. "You can only live your own sweet life. Is it not enough to know that you are one of the light-bearers in this dark world of ours?"

Poor Joscelyne? Praise from his lips was a draught of nectar indeed. She had never known how good she was until this happy moment.

It did not strike her, as she looked up at the young parson's clearly-chiselled face, that there was no meaning at all in his words. They were as sounding brass or clanging cymbal. A man who does not know that he is in the dark can hardly realise the need of light.

Alban Woledge went on his way very contentedly, and troubled himself little about spiritual illumination, although the phrase was often on his lips. One of his sermons on the Light of the World had been printed by request, and he had preached it with considerable self-satisfaction.

As he stood looking down at Joscelyne, he was thinking what a lovely allegorical picture she would make. He could fancy her in a loose white robe, one beautiful arm upraised as she carried an antique lamp, and a soft light falling over the unbound masses of her pale-gold hair.

"Your name ought to have been Lucy," he said after a pause. "And yet I would not have it changed—Joscelyne is so quaint and sweet."

He took his leave at last, and she lingered in the old room for some minutes, going over every word that he had spoken. Then rejoicing in her fool's paradise, she ran upstairs again.

"Oh, Bennet," she began, carefully closing the door, "Mr. Woledge has been here, and he is so sensible and kind! Don't you feel well enough to come down to supper?"

He had been playing, as usual, upon his guitar, and did not

answer at once. Two or three melancholy chords fell on the silence before he spoke.

"Yes, I will come down," he said.

"Do try to be cheerful. What a dismal instrument the guitar is! And you need not fear anything any more, you know; people are forgetting all about that poor fellow. Mr. Woledge says that no one can say definitely that he was——"

"Don't talk lightly, Joscelyne."

"I won't talk of it at all. Dear Bennet, we will quite forget it. But——"

"But what?"

"That girl! Oh, Bennet, what can you do to insure her silence? She has you in her power; she may betray you at any moment!"

"You do not know her, Joscelyne," he said, passing his hand wearily across his temples.

"I know women. How can you know my sex as well as I do? Men never do know us. Cynics say that it is the chief business of women to deceive men. That girl shows suppressed passion in her face; she has eyes that are full of remembrance. You can't make her take life easily and forget. You have been trifling with her, Bennet, and she may have her revenge any day."

"She would not think of it, Joscelyne."

"Not at present, perhaps; she may strike later on, just when you expect it least. If she were to find out that you cared for someone else, there would be no safety for you. Oh, Bennet, I think she is like one of Byron's women——"

"And their revenge is as the tiger's spring,
Deadly and quick and crushing; yet as real
Torture is theirs, what they inflict they feel."

She stood looking at him for a moment, then sighed, and went out of the room. He sat still and thought and thought until his head ached, and he began to fear that she was right.

"Dulcie has depths in her nature," he mused; "she will never forget. There is an intensity of passion in her, and it may surge up all at once. She would be terribly sorry to hurt me, poor girl, but supposing she should lose control over herself! It won't do to cut her entirely."

He rose suddenly and went to his desk. Then he took pen and paper, and wrote one line——

"Meet me in the Angel's Meadow to-morrow at six."

He put these words into a stamped envelope addressed to Dulcie Goss, and then went out in the twilight to post his letter. Afterwards, when he appeared in his old place at the supper-table, he assured Abigail that he felt quite well again.

(To be continued.)

DUTY.

STERN and strict was the colonel, but his heart was loyal and true,
 "Duty first" was his motto, and he acted up to it, too.

Up to his tent rode an orderly: saluting the colonel, he said—

"Order from General Haylitt." Taking the paper he read—

"Get ready at once to join me, not later than twelve to-day,

If you have prisoners, shoot them, then march *without delay*."

The colonel frowned as he read it, sharply he wheeled about,

"Corporal, take you a file of men, and march the prisoners out

Beyond the camp and shoot them; let there be no delay;

Then boot and saddle!"—Still frowning he slowly turned away.

The corporal heard the order; for a moment he did not stir;

Then hastily saluting: "Your son is amongst them, sir."

The colonel turned on him fiercely, though his face was the face
 of the dead,

His voice was stern and unfaltering, "My son is a rebel," he said.

Sitting his horse like a statue he rode to the appointed place,

And one of the rebels raised his head and looked him full in the
 face.

A look of unflinching courage, of a son's undying love—

The colonel solemnly raised his hand, and pointed to Heaven
 above.

"Fire!" the word of command rang out strong and clear as a
 bell;

With his eyes still fixed on his sire's face the rebel staggered and
 fell.

* * * * *

Hard and fast the troops rode on across the sandy plain,

Their colonel's heart was broken, but his honour had never a
 stain.

D. W.



THE GRANGE MYSTERY.

I MUST confess that it was a great blow to me when Mary Crompton married. For ten years had we lived together, sharing the same flat, and almost the same work, for she managed the "Dress and Fashion" department of the *Ladies' Universe*, while I was its general editor. I had grown so accustomed to our united life, that I never dreamed of any change as possible. Imagine then, my surprise and consternation, when one day Mary came to me, blushing like a girl, to tell me that she had met her old lover, who was now a widower, and they were to be married soon.

Of course it was a good thing for her, as Mr. Tristram was very well off, and had a charming place; there were no children, relations-in-law, or other drawbacks to her peace. Though to *my* way of thinking it seemed hardly fair that a man, having made his deliberate choice between two women, should be able, on the death of the favoured one, to come back and find the other ready to accept him. Still that was Mary's business, not mine, and she was entirely contented.

Mr. Tristram was a fine-looking, hearty country squire of forty-five, as devoted to Mary as if he had never thought of anyone else in the past years, and I could not help liking him, even though he robbed me of my friend.

They were married early in the New Year, and at Easter I fulfilled my promise of spending a week with them.

Easter fell early that year. The winter had been a long and severe one, so that the hedges were still bare, the trees leafless, and the country was far from inviting to such a hopelessly prejudiced Londoner as I have always been. Mary met me at the station, just her dear, warm-hearted self, but looking, in her costly furs, and well-appointed brougham, very different from the "Queen Bee" who used to advise the readers of the *Ladies' Universe* what to wear and what to leave unworn. I had to confess reluctantly to myself that a matron of thirty-five is a much more important personage than a spinster of the same age.

As we drove three miles along the white chalk roads to Marsden Grange we had much to say to each other. I told of the progress of my work, and the failings of my new co-editor, who wrote the "Beauty and its Preservation" article every week in our paper, trying all the advertised nostrums upon her own scanty hair and sallow complexion.

Mary told of the goodness and tenderness of her husband, the joys of their country home, and the absolutely unruffled current of her placid life. "My happiness seems all the greater because so unex

pected," she said. "I only wish that you, dear Katharine, were as fortunate."

"It wouldn't suit me a bit," I replied. "I should be perfectly wretched if transplanted to the country, away from the roar of the Strand and the full tide of surging life there. Besides, what would the *Universe* do if deprived of my valuable services? No, no; domestic bliss is not for me, even if I were twenty years younger. I am a *female bachelor* by choice, as well as necessity, and so I must remain."

She was regretfully obliged to agree with me, although there was a pitying look in her sweet, dove-like eyes. Dear soul, she wanted everyone to be happy just in *her* particular way.

The carriage stopped at the door, and John Tristram came forward so kindly and cordially to meet me that I felt myself at once a welcome guest, and quite at home.

The Grange was, perhaps, more of a "house in the country" than a "country house," but it was very large and comfortable. The rooms were long and low, with heavy beams running across the ceilings, and great open hearths, on which wood fires blazed cheerfully. The furniture was old Sheraton and Chippendale, which would have made the mouth of a collector water. Bartolozzi engravings and old portraits adorned the white-panelled walls, and on the landings were oak cupboards full of the rarest china. Tall blue jars stood in every corner, filled with pot-pourri, whose fragrance pervaded the house.

My bedroom was a bright and cheerful one, furnished with red hangings, and I slept well between the lavender-scented sheets, without a dream of work and London.

The Grange was an eminently satisfactory house to be mistress of, and I was glad to see my old friend so admirably settled. She and John Tristram were a truly devoted couple. I could not wish her back with me at Green Park Mansions when I saw how she bloomed anew in her peaceful, prosperous life. As for me, although I enjoyed the week of rest and rustication, I was ready to rush into the fray again at its close.

When the last evening came, I went upstairs early and busied myself with packing, until my travelling clock chimed half-past eleven. "Time to retire," I thought sleepily, and rising to my feet, saw, to my surprise, that the door was wide open. "Dear me, can I have forgotten to close it?" I said, shutting it now vigorously, and beginning my preparations for the night.

I was quietly brushing my hair in front of the glass, when I saw, with utter astonishment, that the door was slowly and deliberately opening. It was a calm, still night. March was "going out like a lamb," and there was not a breath of wind to account for such an occurrence. I felt mystified, and rushing across the room, not only shut but locked the door, and felt that *now* I had conquered it. To my horror, before I could return to the dressing-table, I heard a

grating sound, as the key turned in the lock, and the door slowly, slowly opened again.

I began to feel very uncomfortable, the whole thing was so unaccountable.

Neither John Tristram, Mary, nor any of their staid, respectable servants, could be capable of playing such a trick. Besides, who could possibly open from without a door locked on the inside? I looked down the passage. All lights were out, not a sound was to be heard, the household seemed wrapped in slumber. I shut the door, and, placing my back against it, waited, with an inward misgiving, for what might happen. "I am not a light weight, it will puzzle the thing to move *me*," I thought defiantly. But, after a moment of suspense, I felt the door yield, and I was pushed forward by a force which I was powerless to resist. I summoned up all my courage and looked outside once more; no one was to be seen.

What was the invisible power that moved the door? My common sense revolted against the idea of any supernatural agency in the matter, yet I felt a strange terror, as of some evil presence hovering near me. Strong-minded as I had always considered myself, I trembled as I closed the door again and waited in the stillness with a beating heart; waited I knew not for what. My nerve was fast forsaking me. I dared not go on struggling with the door, the power that moved it was too strong for me to contend against. It now slowly opened again, and I knew that my room was the only one occupied in the corridor. No use, therefore, to scream for help, no use to ring my bell, as the servants would be asleep. Time was going on; the hands of the clock pointed to midnight, the turret clock slowly tolled out the twelve ghostly strokes, and a new terror seized me.

What if this thing, so awful, although unseen, were to take shape and enter the room? My hair rose at the thought. If it had not already been grey, I am sure that the horror of those moments would have made it so. My brain reeled. I stood there, afraid to move, my eyes fixed on the open door, over whose haunted threshold I should have to pass before procuring aid. It seemed like *hours*, though really only a few minutes, before I heard steps and voices in the distance, then nearing my room.

I can never describe the feeling of reaction and intense relief when John Tristram and Mary appeared on the scene.

He looked anxious, and she seemed puzzled, but both saw at once that I was in no state to be questioned. They led me away to the smoking-room on the other landing, where a bright fire burned. Mary drew me to an arm-chair, and chafed my cold hands, while her husband made me drink some brandy.

The warmth revived me, and I began to feel more like myself. "What good angel sent you to my help?" I said. Mary answered first.

"All I know is, that I was sitting here with John while he smoked his last pipe. He suddenly got up, looked at the calendar on the mantel-piece, and exclaimed: 'It is the 30th, not the 29th, and Miss Hunt is in the Red Room! Come to her at once.' So off we went, though I don't in the least know why, or what has happened."

I related my weird experience in as few words as possible. Mr. Tristram sat silently by, until I begged for an explanation of what I had seen. Then he began his story.

"I inherited this place," he said, "from my godfather Mr. Marsden, an old bachelor, who always told me that he would never marry, because his father was insane; but I never knew the whole truth until I took possession here, when his family solicitor thought it right to tell me.

"Ninety years ago, it must be now, since Mr. Marsden's father was living happily here, with his pretty young wife and infant son, when a fall in the hunting-field caused an injury to his brain, and he became a changed man. Instead of being a lively, high-spirited fellow, he was now gloomy and morose, distrustful of everyone, but especially of his wife, becoming madly jealous of her without the slightest reason. The doctors whom Mrs. Marsden called in pronounced him hopelessly insane, and advised her to send him to an asylum. She could not bear the idea, and insisted on keeping him at home, in charge of an attendant.

"His mania became more acute, and one night he broke into his wife's room, forcing open the locked door, murdered her, and then took his own life. Ever since, on the anniversary of that fatal 30th of March, it has been impossible to keep the door locked, and all attempts at doing so have failed. Twenty years ago, I was a young and sceptical man, so I resolved to test the truth of the solicitor's legend. On the night when the phenomenon was expected to occur, I went to the Red Room, locked the door, piled all the heavy furniture against it, and sat down to watch. In a few seconds my barricade was sent flying, as the key turned and the door stood wide open before my astonished eyes. Seeing was believing; I was convinced that there could be no trickery in the matter; so no one has ever been allowed to occupy the room on the anniversary of poor Mrs. Marsden's death, until to-night. I had the original door taken down and replaced by another, but without effect, as I satisfied myself that the result was the same as before. I hardly dare ask you to forgive me, Miss Hunt, for the terrible experience you have had, owing to my carelessness. My only excuse is that I stupidly imagined *this* to be the 29th and that you were leaving us on the 30th. Mary was so anxious that you should have the Red Room, that I could not prevent it, without telling her the whole story, which I was anxious not to do."

Then he turned to his wife, and added:

"I hope it will not give you a dislike to your new home, dear Mary. Nothing ever happens here, except on this particular night.

For the rest of the year, the most nervous person might sleep in that room with perfect security."

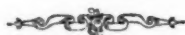
"I should not like to try the experiment," I said with a shudder, thinking of the ghastly moments I had spent there.

"Poor Katharine," said Mary sympathetically. "I am so grieved about it. But you don't blame John, do you? It really was not his fault."

Of course I had to satisfy her by absolving her dear John; but in my own heart I thought that he had acted in a very stupid and muddle-headed way. A *woman* would soon have found a way out of the difficulty, by declaring that there were rats, or a smoky chimney; *anything* rather than allow a guest to be nearly frightened to death; but one cannot expect diplomacy from a *man*, I argued.

I was thankful to find myself back in town next day. My flat looked very cosy and commonplace after that haunted house, and the roar of London sounded like music in my ears.

This happened two years ago, but my nerves have not quite recovered the shock, nor have I availed myself of Mary's oft-repeated entreaties to pay another visit to Marsden Grange. Not even to see the most wonderful infant in England will I venture there; so she talks of bringing him to me, as the only way out of the difficulty.



WHITHER AND WHY.

"Why do the winds howl so fiercely, brother,
Like a pack of hounds in cry?
Is it a soul flees before them, brother,
Across the cloud-strewn sky?"

"'Tis because the Old Year's passing, brother,
And no longer here may stay;
And the winds are the wild horses, brother,
That bear his soul away."

"And is he grown old so soon, brother,
And no longer may abide?
And whither on those wild horses, brother,
Say, whither does he ride?"

"To the Land of Things that Have Been, brother,
Where the souls of Old Years stay;
We shall find them again, and know them, brother,
At the Judgment Day."

MARY A. M. MARKS,

THE SPIRIT OF THE WHITE MOTH.

A LOVELY August moon was shedding its silver rays over the sleeping waters of the Thames. Outside all was still with the hushed silence of a summer night, which finds a response in some human beings, and sets a seal on their gay laughter and talk.

The swifts had whistled themselves weary and gone to rest in their nests under the eaves of a pretty house situated as near the river brink as it could well be. The green reeds on the bank had quivered out their good-night to the loosestrife standing tall and high beside them. The moor-hen had called her young to shelter in the rushes for the night. The bats had vanished silently, and the owl, with a sense of the fitness of things did not disturb the harmony and quiet by his harsh cry.

Not a sound broke the stillness. Amid all this vast universal darkness, the only animate creatures visible were a woman and a large white moth. The woman looked like a shadowy silhouette framed in the open window of the pretty house overlooking the river. Her face was turned towards the sky. She was silent and alone. The moth was restless, and in his restlessness fluttered in at the open window and looked at its occupant. It was not a young face, for over thirty summers had taken its rounded beauty away ; but in the still beautiful eyes was a look that arrested the white moth at once. The look told of sorrow and longing. It interested him far more than dimpled rosy cheeks. He flew closer to her and listened to her thoughts. Her soul was awake, and her inner mind was talking to itself. "How lovely the world is!" she was thinking. "I ought to be happy and content, yet I am not."

"Every living creature has trouble," whispered the moth. "What would you wish altered?" The woman fancied she was asking herself the question, yet it was the white moth which whispered it to her.

"I know that," said the woman. "I feel it is only just that each of us should have sorrow. I only want mine changed. Give me poverty, hardship, anything but the burden laid upon me."

"You are not alone in that," said the white moth. "I have listened to the sorrows of thousands, and many, many of them had the same cry. It is such an old, old cry. You say you would bear poverty, yet you of all people love beautiful houses, purple and fine linen, good food and all luxuries. You think the life of the poor would be better than your own?" asked the moth.

"Yes. I think to have a helpmate who worked all day, and to work myself all day the same, without leisure to be vexed by riddles we can only half solve, would be perfect happiness."

"You have not peeped into the cottages at night as I have done.

You do not know the trials of the poor, which I have witnessed. The worn-out mother sighing her life out for the sake of her children; the poor man dying by inches of starvation."

"You may be as rich as Croesus, yet you cannot buy health or happiness."

"You may be as poor as Job and be in the very same plight," sighed the white moth.

"What *may* I have then?"

"*Content*," said the moth.

"I cannot even have that," said the woman. "In spite of all endeavour, my resolutions are so frequently broken. I try to live up to a higher self, and just when I think I have attained a little nearer to all I hope to be, suddenly my old self rushes in upon me, and slays all my hard-won fight at one fell swoop. What a tangle life is, and what a mystery! Everything seems crooked. Can we ever put it straight, I wonder? What is the good of living?"

"When it comes to comparing lives, why should not I be discontented too? I am only a white moth with the shortest existence! Why should I not too cry out: 'Of what use is life?' Yet I am content to do what I can till my little day is over, without questioning 'why.' The great tiresome 'whys' make us lose sight of what little happiness is near us. Let us live and be content. As to putting matters straight, we may as well make up our minds that we shall *never* do that," sighed the moth. "The surest way to keep our ideals and gain content, is to lay down self entirely, forgetting whether we are happy or not. If you say to yourself, 'I will do as much for others as I can, and live a life of renunciation as far as I can,' you will enjoy this lovely world better, you will not grow weary of it before your time, and you will reach a higher level where you will dwell more and more on the spiritual side of life, which is near us, ever and always, waiting to be understood, waiting to ennoble us, if we will but listen to its silent voice."

The woman sighed deeply. When the white moth brushed past her, it saw tears in her eyes. She did not start as its wings gently touched her cheek. It felt like the farewell caress of a sympathetic friend. She believed it had given her an idea.

Suddenly pattering footsteps were heard, the door opened, and a rosy-cheeked boy entered. "Look mother, there's a big moth buzzing round the lamp."

"Don't let it get burnt," said his mother anxiously.

As if obeying her earnest wish, the big white moth fluttered out into the night again unhurt.

"Pooh! it's only a moth," said the boy.

"One good turn deserves another," was his mother's enigmatical answer. After that she returned to everyday matters, and her little world once more; but the white moth's idea lived and blossomed into fruition.

FAIR MAUD OF CASTLE BAYNARD.

THE HEROINE OF THE ROUND TURRET OF THE TOWER.

BY LIZZIE ALLDRIDGE, AUTHOR OF 'THE TOWER GARDENS,'
'THE QUEEN'S HOUSE,' ETC., ETC.

I.

THE Tower Gardens, which once my fancy made my own, are mine no more; and I am glad they are not. It is but right they should be public property; for the enjoyment of the many, and not of the few.

The many do enjoy them nowadays, thoroughly. Go into the Tower Gardens during the workman's dinner-hour, and you will find every one of the seats filled.

And on a fine day how bright it is there still, how emerald green is the broad, smooth lawn; how delightful the long walks beside the deep moat where the recruits are drilling; and beyond that moat, with what beauty and dignity rises the great Tower of London. Great and mighty still, in spite of the gigantic bridge that now tries to dwarf it! Still, as in olden days when the public owned not those gardens, one can sit and note how the mid-day sun brings out the red of the Tower flag, and touches up the gold on each little crown and pennant of the three square turrets, and penetrates even the two great round eyes of the circular clock turret, lighting up Time itself, as marked on their dials.

Always has that south-eastern turret been round; but anciently, instead of those two clock dials, it had little Norman windows, like those still to be seen in the other turrets.

Sometimes, when a warder takes a party of sight-seers over the Tower, he will pause on the green, and, pointing to that south-east turret, will speak the name of a beautiful young girl who was murdered up there for being brave and virtuous, centuries before Flamstead, the astronomer, went to work there, or anyone had so much as invented a clock like those that now give time to the Tower garrison.

Mid-day, however, and its inevitable prose, hardly sets the imagination free to work on such a story as that of Maud Fitz-Walter, for at noon, what one sees here, in these gardens, so fills the outward eye, that it gives the inward sense but little chance. One must come again and again to these Gardens, and must see them under many widely different aspects, before the Tower and its turrets will reveal

themselves, or the visitor have an eye to see or an ear to hear. Once I saw and heard; and this was how the right time for that seeing and hearing came.

It was on a gloomy winter afternoon when the short daylight had nearly all faded, that the mighty and terrible Past, and the mightier and more terrible Present, came rushing together, in a way they had never done before in all the centuries of the Tower's history, and I was there—by accident, as one says—to see and hear. Perhaps I was the only one who did then see and hear what was then revealed to me.

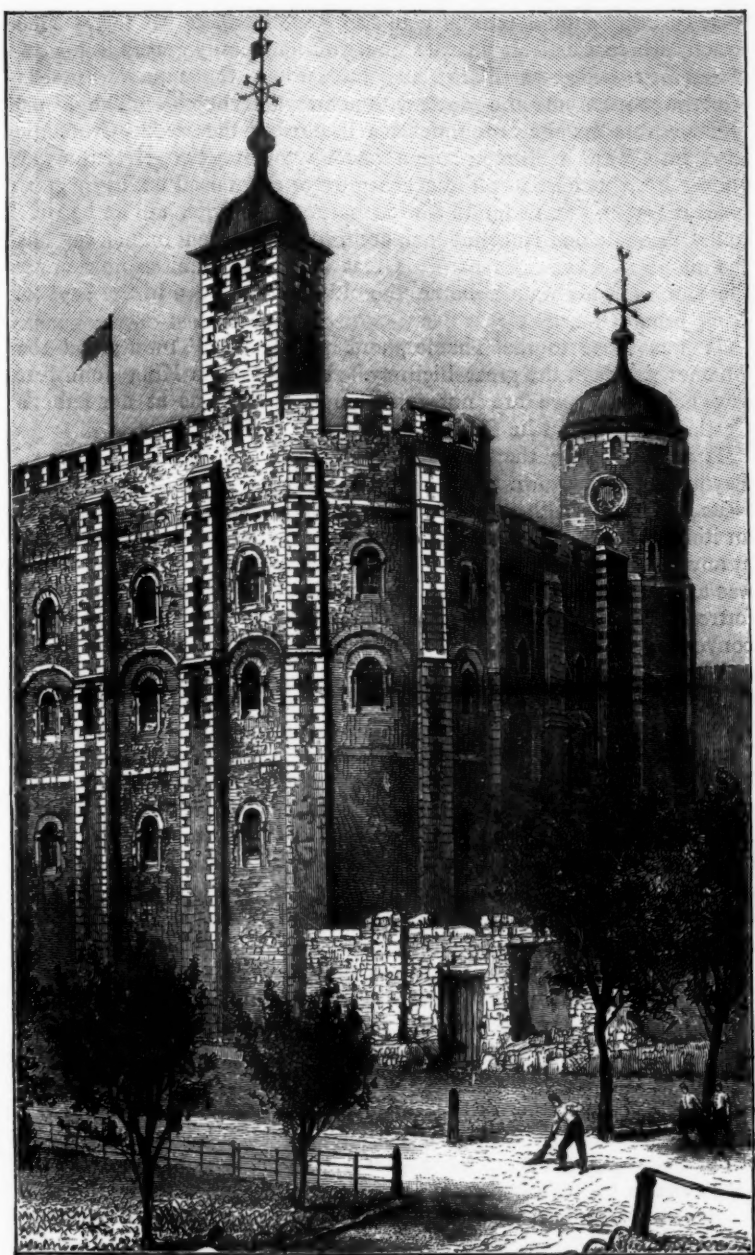
A broad new road now crosses Tower Hill; the traffic from the new bridge demands it. That new road was opened on the gloomy winter day I have just mentioned. I stood among the crowd near the gates of these same Gardens, while the short formalities were gone through. It was all prosaic and common-place as well could be. The carmen from the docks, mounted on their heavy waggons, gathered in numbers beyond the bar that guarded the road, and waited in eager silence, until there was a shout, the bar was removed, the wheels of the procession of great waggons crunched slowly over the freshly laid gravel. It was all absolutely matter-of-fact, and utterly uninspiring.

Anxious only to escape a somewhat unpleasant crowd, and having the key of the Tower Gardens with me—for they were not then public property—I entered. In one minute I was alone, out of the crowd, in solitude. And in what a solitude! The Tower, the Gardens, were in a profound gloom, weird and mystic with only such solemn light as one sees in a deep-toned, time-mellowed etching, while the Tower's ancient walls and bastions echoed and re-echoed with reverberations as of a thunder that had something most strangely human in it. It was the Tower giving back its own tragic histories, the while it echoed the roar of traffic on the newest road of modern London. No sound more soul-thrilling, more awe-inspiring, have I ever heard in all my life!

On such a moment, strong as the present grips one, the past comes back once more; such a moment, as it now recurs to the memory, brings with it a fair young face, gleaming white, despairing but resolute, from the little Norman window that once was in the south-east turret.

Her name was Maud, "Fair Maud," they used to call her. She was the daughter of Robert Fitz-Walter, and her father was the greatest man in all the city, when King John was away from his Tower of London.

The Tower, a vast extension of the Roman bastion of the original wall, guarded Old London to the east. Castle Baynard, near another angle of the same wall, guarded the city to the west; and Castle Baynard, a Norman keep in those days, was the home of the Fitz-Walters.



THE ROUND TURRET OF THE TOWER.

If curiosity should prompt you, as I hope it will, to see for yourself exactly where Castle Baynard stood, you may easily gratify it. Find the *Times* Office at Blackfriars, just where the modern Queen Victoria Street and the ancient Thames Street join. The *Times* Office covers the site of the western bastion of the wall. Cross the road into Thames Street and a short way down that riverside way among great warehouses where swing huge galvanised tanks, or great bales of paper, you will find a wide gateway between tall and grimy walls, above which is a timbered arch, bearing, in enormous capitals the name of Castle Baynard. Great business premises now cover the site of Fair Maud's home, the old Norman keep in the days of King John.

It was close to the Thames, and so was the Tower; and the Thames was then the great highway. How or when King John first saw Fair Maud we are not told; no doubt it was at her father's Castle Baynard that he first set his evil eye upon her.

It was in 1213 that Robert Fitz-Walter became the castellan of Baynard. It is known that King John during that year paid several visits to London, although he was continually on the move. There is an itinerary of his still preserved by which one may see where he was at any given date during the whole of his reign. During 1213 he was at the Tower and also with his friends, the Templars, at their new fortress at the Temple, where the men of law now dwell; a short and convenient distance by boat from Blackfriars and Castle Baynard.

Why did he find her so fair? Who knows? Everyone in the City found her fair; she belonged to a race renowned for beauty and for valour, whose tombs may still be seen in the Priory Church of Little Dunmow, Essex; for they were Barons of Dunmow, were the Fitz-Walters of Castle Baynard. There lies Fair Maud's great-grandfather the Crusader in his chain armour, with his crossed legs. There beside him his wife with her refined and clear-cut profile, under a curious, mitre-shaped head-dress, richly flowered, and a jewelled necklet round her stately throat. A true woman, doubtless, with all her dignity; for a little chubby hand, all that now remains of what was once an infant or an angel, gently touches her stone pillow.

But Fair Maud's beauty was not of that courtly kind; she was a simple, round-faced, smiling creature, with a broad, open brow and frank, fearless eyes, when she left the seclusion of Little Dunmow for the brave pageants of London Town.

Perhaps it was just the fairness and the freshness of this innocent young country girl that stirred the jaded affections of the wicked king; for wicked he was, and we are still allowed to keep him as the Villain of our national history. I have it on very good authority that he has not yet been whitewashed.

In order rightly to appreciate the fast-coming tragedy we must realise what was the position of Fair Maud as the daughter of Robert Fitz-Walter; we must see how great and mighty a man her father

was even then, although not yet had he gained the title by which he is best known in history. He was a greater man even than Henry Fitz-Aylwin, the first Lord Mayor of London, who had ruled the municipality now for twenty-three years. He was "Lord of London Town," and only the king himself was his chief. Not one of the great nobles whose houses then were within the city walls could presume to be his equal, while in his own particular ward, the ground between St. Paul's and the Thames, still called Castle Baynard Ward, he was supreme magistrate, with the power of life and death in his hands. He could, if he saw fit, have a criminal tied to a stake on his wharf and left there for two ebbs and two flowings of the tide.

Mr. Crockett has recently described this kind of death in his "Men of the Moss Heg;" it was how they drowned the Wigton Martyrs in the Covenanting times. We are not told of any instance in which Robert Fitz-Walter availed himself of his right to inflict this barbarous death, but for all that it lay within his power to do so. A few years since there was fire at the present Castle Baynard Wharf which cleared away a considerable space. I happened to see the place then, and noticing how the river runs in between Castle Baynard and its neighbour, the Carron Warehouse, I could but observe how full and deep that creek looked; a convenient place for the drowning of a criminal, had Fitz-Walter willed it.

So the Fitz-Walters of Castle Baynard were mighty and prosperous when King John first had his barge stopped at their water-gate and stairs by that convenient creek. Having come once, he came again; he came many times, until he made the Queen extremely jealous, and caused much scandal.

His intentions were not honourable, but such as they were he laid them before Fair Maud. She at once returned a resolute No.

The King seems to have been surprised; for although he was now well on in his forties, and his once yellow hair had turned grey, he was still a handsome man, with the memory that not so long ago he had been held to be the handsomest man of his time. They say that fierce and dogged as he had always been with men, with women he had hitherto found himself irresistible. But arts or charms that had so often prevailed with others, were powerless against this brave young girl, Fair Maud Fitz-Walter.

One portrait of King John, his effigy in Worcester Cathedral, has preserved for us his features in carved stone that compels one to feel its absolute truthfulness; there, under the superficial fairness, is shown that ruthless cruelty few mortal men could resist.

When Maud had said nay to him, in his assumed gentleness did she see his lips set hard above the fast clenched teeth as they are set in effigy? It may have been; that face may have inspired her with terror and despair; all the same, she had for the King nothing but that one unwavering reply.

Failing with Maud he tried her father, who could better gauge the King's power and his own.

The thing seems to us, in these days, incredible; it appears to have struck the King as still more incredible when Robert Fitz-Walter, like his daughter, had but one word in response to all he could advance, and that one word—No!

The King went away in wrath. Despair fell upon the Lord of Castle Baynard, for he knew what kind of a man King John was, and that he himself and all he loved and all he owned were doomed to destruction.

King John lost no time with that rebellious father and daughter. He simply sent the host of ruffians he always had in his employ to storm Castle Baynard. They burned it to the ground, and took Fair Maud down the river to the Tower of London, where they locked her up in that round turret, still to be seen at the south-east angle of the great Norman keep. As for her father, Robert Fitz-Walter, he managed to escape to France, then a refuge for a good many of King John's subjects.

The winter had set in; it was bitterly cold up in that turret. In the sad annals of the Tower, the prisoners suffering from cold—cold and hunger combined—are among the most piteous of the records. Strong souls, from whom torture could not wring submission, have been quelled by that terrible cold and hunger; even Walter Raleigh found the cold worse than the block and axe. "But," was his despairing comment on his own privations, "I complain not; I know it is vain."

Maud Fitz-Walter, however, knew that in her case escape lay in her own power—one word only need she have uttered.

No record of her lonely suffering up in that dismal turret prison has come down to us, but we can well imagine her terrors, her despair, in spite of the brave heart within her, as she saw from one narrow window the un pitying walls of the great fortress that was the symbol to her of the King's irresistible power, and from the other, the seemingly endless distance of open country, and the dull wintry river veiled in damp cold mists, while not a human being was near to aid her, and no hope or help but in God and her own dauntless innocence remained.

It grew near the Feast of the Nativity, and King John, in that year, spent a few days at the Tower. He had not been there for some time, for he knew the city hated him, now more than ever, and even in that stronghold he hardly felt secure.

Probably he thought that cold and hunger, loneliness and terror, would have, by this time, produced their ordinary effect upon Maud Fitz-Walter.

He did not take the trouble to ascend to her turret himself; he simply sent a messenger to her, "about," says the chronicler, "his old suit of love."

By this messenger Fair Maud returned her old answer—her same resolute No.

King John could be at times a man of very rapid and decisive action: he was so on this occasion.

"The next time she is hungry," he said, when the final message was brought down to him, "let them fry her an egg, and let them so season it that she will never need another meal."

This order given, King John went back to Windsor and kept Christmas there.

Fair Maud was taken down to her childhood's home at Little Dunmow, in her coffin, and buried in the tomb of the Fitz-Walters in the Priory Church.

II.

KING JOHN had little time to brood over so trivial an incident as the obstinacy of Maud Fitz-Walter, for troubles came thick upon him, and the Church, the Barons, as well as the King of France kept his hands pretty full, until at length the decisive victory of his old enemy Philip brought things to a crisis, and negotiations for a truce were begun.

Negotiations are inevitably tedious. While these were pending it so happened that King John, being in France, the French and English armies lay encamped on opposite banks of a river or arm of the sea, and fighting, their usual occupation, being suspended, they found themselves with nothing to do. This was a state of things that became, after a while, so insupportable, that in sheer desperation it would seem (but it is just possible that it was after all an arranged plot), an English knight called across the water to the Frenchmen, asking if there were a man among them who would come over and try a joust or two with him.

A mighty shout was the response, and soon a knight fully armed with vizor down and riding a barbed charge was seen to leave the French camp and make his way to the river's edge where a ferry boat awaited him.

Intense was the excitement in the English camp. The lists were soon cleared and the two knights on the ground, while the King, as well as his host, eagerly backed their champion, whose happy thought had brought their boredom to an end.

Hardly, however, had the combat begun than it was over. The knight from the French camp struck but one blow, but that one thrust with his great spear brought the mailed English knight and his barbed horse to the ground.

The champion from the French army never raised his vizor, but without a word turned his back upon the English King and was ferried over again to the Frenchmen.

"By heaven's truth!" broke out King John as he watched the retreating warrior. "He were a King indeed who had such a knight."

Now although the stranger had never lifted his vizor there was many a Baron present who had recognised in him the most valiant man of their order, Robert Fitz-Walter, of Castle Baynard and Little Dunmow.

Possibly the Fitz-Walter incident had by this time almost faded from King John's memory, for he did not recognise Fair Maud's father; but, as with all his faults, he was a true soldier and could appreciate a well-aimed blow, his enthusiasm was real and spontaneous.

Fitz-Walter had many friends among the English Barons. Seeing the King's evident admiration of that master-stroke, and taking advantage of his own exclamation, they hastily chose a spokesman, who, running to the King flung himself at his feet, crying out:

"O King, he is no Frenchman. He is your own knight! It was Robert Fitz-Walter who ran that joust!"

"Was it so!" exclaimed the King. "Then happy am I to have such a knight. Let him straightway come to me!"

Fitz-Walter came at once; not perhaps loath to quit the ranks of his country's enemies; for it may be his knightly conscience told him that even for a private wrong so terrible as his, he had no right to fight against England.

Nothing could exceed the graciousness of his reception. King John was magnanimous, forgave him everything; and not only granted Fitz-Walter permission to rebuild his ruined castle, but made him governor of Hertford.

So when the truce was concluded and the camps struck, Robert Fitz-Walter found himself once more at home in the City of London, but in a home that had no Fair Maud within it; she was lying dead and buried at Little Dunmow.

Then came the great and final struggle between the King and the Barons, and the city was with the Barons.

The city had welcomed their "Lord of London Town." In the civil war that followed, Fitz-Walter, who had long been banner-bearer of the city, became the chosen leader of the Barons, the "Marshal of the Army of God and of the Church."

At length there came a day when Fitz-Walter again, in full armour, mounted on a horse also covered with armour, and attended by his own armed retainers, rode up to the great west gate of St. Paul's, and waited in the shadow of the vast Gothic Cathedral.

Presently the Lord Mayor, Aldermen, and Sheriffs, all likewise armed, came out of the wide porch, bearing aloft the great banner of St. Paul, whereon shone in the sunlight the golden image of the Apostle and his silver sword.

Fitz-Walter dismounted and saluted the Mayor, who gave him the banner, with which he rode away through the Chepe and Cornhill,

down to the Priory of the Holy Trinity, Aldgate, where the banner, being too sacred to expose in war, was left in safety.

Not for the first time did Fitz-Walter perform the ceremony; perhaps he remembered that his daughter had once witnessed it with almost childish glee; perhaps the memory of this helped him in the desperate struggle that followed.

At length, after much fighting, there came a bright May morning—a Sunday morning—when Fitz-Walter and “The Army of God” returned victorious, and quietly marched through Aldgate to their homes. A few days later the Tower of London itself was in their hands; but it was too late then for Fitz-Walter to rescue his daughter from her turret; death, a greater than he, had done so long ago.

Once more, and but once more, did King John and Fitz-Walter meet.

It was at Runnymede, on the day of the signing of the Great Charter that “the Army of God” had wrung from the King. The King had signed in sullen, wordless rage; the great churchmen and the earls around the sovereign had followed, and opposite stood the great host of the Barons.

And who, among all their host, was the first to step forward to add his name to the immortal list? Who but he whose right it was, their leader, the Marshal of the Army of God, the Lord of Baynard, the banner-bearer of the City of London, Robert Fitz-Walter, the father of the fair, brave Maud, the heroine of the south-east turret.

Did the King mark the bitter irony of Fitz-Walter’s act? If he did not, full many a baron did, and knew how much their cause, the cause of England’s freedom, owed to fair Maud’s lonely martyrdom in that solitary prison, to her steady courage and her unalterable No!

THE MISERRIMUS-STONE.*

(WORCESTER CATHEDRAL.)

Along the cloister’s hallowed way
The stranger lingers, pausing thus,
To read on stone time-worn and grey
That lone, sad word “Miserrimus.”

Beneath yon slab a faithful priest
In solemn stillness patient lies,
Perchance with face towards the east,
And waiting till his sun shall rise.

* “The Miserrimus-Stone. . . . Thought to be the burial-place of the Reverend Thomas Morris, . . . Minor Canon . . . and Vicar of Claines, who refused to take the oaths to William III. and was . . . deprived of his preferments. He afterwards lived in great poverty . . . and ordered this single word to be engraved on his tomb.”—*Cathedral Handbook.*

Why did he write himself most sad,
Most miserable of all men born?
Because with Him he served he had
His day of obloquy and scorn?

The Holy Book to him bequeathed,
Wrote "Blest are they who shall endure,"
And line on line within it breathed
A benediction on the poor.

See how the Royal Master stands,
The while those gracious words He spake—
"Whoso shall lose or house or lands
For My name and the Gospel's sake—

"Whoso shall give up aught for Me,
Or wealth or friend, or child or wife,
A double portion his shall be,
And after this, eternal life."

He gave his all, his strength he spent,
Nor feared the bitter cup to quaff;
And when unto his rest he went,
He chose his hopeless epitaph.

Of griefs that did his soul oppress,
None now the secret e'er shall win;
The heart knows its own bitterness,
The stranger has no lot therein.

Some come with triumph and with shout
From their sharp conflict to their crown;
Some have but strength, with life worn out,
To lay the weary burden down.

But surely, lapped in perfect peace,
He waits the ending of his quest;
Behind Death's door the troublers cease,
And all the heavy-hearted rest.

And who can tell with what clear sight
He marked the shadows flee away?
For heaviness endures a night,
But joy shall come at break of day.

Yet still within this tranquil place
He makes his sad appeal to us.
God in His mercy grant him grace
Who once was called "Miserrimus."

CHRISTIAN BURKE.



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